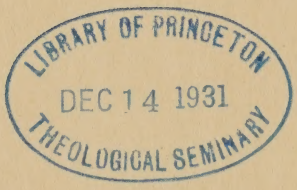

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Meeting the challenge of
modern doubt

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN DOUBT

BOOKS BY

JAMES GORDON GILKEY

A FAITH FOR THE NEW GENERATION
SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE LIVING
THE CERTAINTY OF GOD
SOLVING LIFE'S EVERYDAY PROBLEMS
MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN DOUBT

Meeting the Challenge of Modern Doubt

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BY

JAMES GORDON GILKEY, M.A., D.D.

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1931

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SET UP BY BROWN BROTHERS LINOTYPERS
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TO MY THREE CHILDREN

GORDON
MARGARET
EDITH

WHOSE GENERATION MUST FACE THE NEW PROBLEMS
AND WIN THE NEW FAITH

FOREWORD

ANYONE who discusses religious doubts with intelligent people to-day soon makes two significant discoveries. One is that the questions such people raise involve the basic assumptions and the important conclusions of religious faith rather than any of its minor details. In the case of young people, particularly college students, this fact is immediately apparent. These young people no longer ask questions about this or that miracle story in the Bible, or this or that single doctrine in the orthodox Christian system. Rather they inquire with bewildering frankness whether an intelligent man can conclude that there is any meaning in life, whether the familiar belief in God is anything more than a pitiful defense-mechanism devised by human beings who dare not face the fact of their own appalling insignificance, and whether a religious teacher who lived in rural Palestine nineteen centuries ago has any significance whatever for the new urban and industrial civilization of to-day. Here are the questions flung at every

religious leader of our time. Unless modern Christianity can find answers to them the more highly educated groups within modern society will gradually but inevitably drift away from religion and religious institutions.

The second discovery religious leaders are now making is that the traditional way of meeting these doubts has become inadequate. To advise, as the ministers of the past did, that the skeptics turn to the old authorities—either the Church, or the Bible, or the words of Jesus himself—and trust them implicitly, now proves pitifully ineffective. The skeptics do not grant the jurisdiction of the old authorities, and they flatly refuse to accept their verdicts. To imply that the skeptics ought not to entertain such doubts, or to insinuate that their intellectual difficulties are rooted in secret sin, is to bring the discussion to an immediate and an indignant conclusion. The doubters of to-day will not permit anyone to assert that it is wrong to ask questions, or advance the notion that those who have honest doubts are thereby proved secret sinners.

During the last fifteen years many people, in particular many school and college students, have

brought to the author their questions about the religious view of life, and their doubts as to the validity of the Christian message in the modern world. This book attempts to correlate and restate these modern uncertainties, to suggest why they have arisen in so many minds, and to offer possible answers to them. The author realizes that many of the answers he gives differ radically from the answers offered by the ministers of the past and still offered by many ministers to-day. But his years of contact with students and with older people who accept not only the conclusions of modern science but also the attitudes implied by it, have convinced him that the new doubts must be met in a new way. The weapons with which nineteenth-century Christianity won its battles are not the weapons which twentieth-century Christianity can employ in its new conflicts.

It would have been possible to present this list of modern doubts and the answers suggested for them in the traditional question-and-answer form of a catechism. But, as many of us can testify, catechisms are not easy reading, and it has seemed wiser to offer this material in another form. In some of these chapters the doubts are quoted directly, and then an attempt is made to indicate the basic questions which

they raise and to offer an answer to those questions. In other chapters the doubts are implied rather than stated explicitly. Throughout the book the author has tried to lay more emphasis on answers than on questions, and has sought to arrange the chapters in such a sequence that the argument of the book will progress steadily from one major conclusion to the next.

For those who are not troubled by the new doubts, and for those who are thoroughly satisfied with the form of Christian belief taught in an earlier day, this book is not intended. The author hopes that the readers who disagree with his point of view and reject his conclusions will recall this frank and explicit statement. These chapters were not written for the people, old or young, who feel that the new world should accept the old faith in unchanged form. The book is offered to those, and to those alone, who realize that they cannot cling to the ancient formulation of Christian ideas and ideals, and who recognize that they must presently find a new faith or abandon religion completely. That our modern world is filled with such people no discriminating observer will deny. All about us, as most ministers and religious leaders now agree, are multitudes of men and women

who are "wistful but unconvinced." It is for this group, and this group alone, that these chapters are written.

J. G. G.

April, 1931

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	Foreword	vii
I.	The Religious Revolution of To-day	1
II.	The Source of Authority in Modern Religion	27
III.	What Is the Meaning of Life?	46
IV.	The New Christian Epic	63
V.	Our Growing Knowledge of God	81
VI.	Is God Interested in Individuals?	104
VII.	Modern Questions about Prayer	123
VIII.	Does God Ever Take the Initiative?	145
IX.	Rival Conceptions of Jesus Current To-day	167
X.	Some Anti-Christian Forces in Modern Life	190
XI.	Can Modern Christianity Transform Character?	213
XII.	Do the New Beliefs Rob Christianity of Its Beauty?	233

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN DOUBT

CHAPTER I

THE RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION OF TO-DAY

I

PROBABLY the first thing to be said on this subject is that there is always a revolution, in religion and in everything else. Every department of life reveals incessant change. The people who imagine that our predecessors lived in a quiet and an orderly world, while our generation is compelled to watch precious ideas vanish and venerable institutions decay, should read history. The fact is our parents, our grandparents, and our great-grandparents all lived in eras of crisis and transition. They, like us, were bewildered by the changes they saw going on about them.

Study the following sentences and see if you can guess their date. "In the days now passing over us even fools are arrested to ask the meaning of them. Few of the generations of men have seen more impressive times. Days of endless calamity, disruption, dislocation, confusion worse confounded. The ruin is universal. If there is to be a world at all it must

be a new world. That human beings can ever return to the old sorry routine and proceed with any steadfastness and continuance therein is a hope no longer tenable. These days of universal death must be days of universal rebirth if the ruin is not to be total and final. This is a time to make the dullest man consider whence he came and whither he is bound. It is a veritable new era." [1] Those words might have been written by one of our contemporaries. They describe almost perfectly the current situation, particularly in religion. As a matter of fact they were written by Thomas Carlyle in 1850, during an era that most of us imagine was singularly quiet and stable.

Because great changes are constantly taking place we find in every period in history individuals who are convinced that disaster is close at hand. These pessimists and prophets of disaster are particularly evident in the field of religion. Noting the disappearance of old beliefs and institutions they announce excitedly that faith is about to vanish from the earth. Curiously enough they forget that this prophecy has been made many times in the past, and that on each occasion it has failed to come true. Stranger still,

[1] Quoted by L. P. Jacks in *Religious Perplexities*, p. 46.

they overlook the emergence during their own time of the new forms of belief and the new institutions within which the old faith—in somewhat modified form—is to survive.

Some months ago the editor of one of our influential magazines, distressed by the apparent indifference of young people toward religion, wrote a friend, "I wish I could share your belief in the prevalence of religious feeling among the young people of our time. I have been closely connected with schools of considerable size, and like most fathers who keep open house I have seen many young people. It is borne in upon me by almost daily experience that the religious impulse is, for the time being, losing its power. If you read the intimate letters and journals of young people you will see that there is room for grave doubt about the future, at least for the impairment of optimism." [2] Compare those words with the ones which George Whitefield wrote almost two centuries before. Discussing the alleged waning of religious interest in Boston, Mr. Whitefield said in 1740, "Boston has kept the form of religion, but has lost much of the power. I have not heard of any remarkable

[2] A private letter addressed to the author.

stir in Boston for many years. Jewels, patches, and gay apparel are commonly worn by the female sex. The infants who are brought for baptism are wrapped in such finery that one would think they had been brought to church to be initiated into, rather than renounce, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world." [3] A generation earlier the gloom seems to have been quite as deep. Dr. Increase Mather, preaching at Harvard in 1696, held before the undergraduates this cheerful picture. "It is the judgment of many very learned men that in the glorious times promised to the Church America will be hell. Although a number of the elect are still to be born here, I am afraid that in process of time New England will be the wofullest place in all America, just as some other parts of the world—once famous for religion—are now the dolefullest on earth, perfect pictures and emblems of hell. When you see this little academy fallen to the ground then know it is a terrible thing God is about to bring upon this land!" [4]

But in spite of these gloomy forebodings, and in spite of the incessant changes which are responsible

[3] Quoted in *The Heart of the Puritan* (Macmillan, 1917), p. 24.

[4] H. K. Rowe, *The History of Religion in the United States*, p. 44.

for them, religion and religious institutions endure. The much-advertised, long-expected, and eagerly awaited disappearance of faith does not take place. People still build churches, still gather in them to worship and pray, and still formulate systems of religious belief. Why? Because religion represents a fundamental human interest and satisfies fundamental human needs. When all is said, there is in most people a longing to find the Someone they feel must be at the heart of things. What is He like? What does He want of us? What is He trying to do with this world of ours, and with the millions of human creatures upon it? Nor does the religious impulse stop there. Most people have at times an insistent impulse to worship, to pray, to commune with this Other Self. Their prayers may not be of a conventional type, and years may pass between to-day's prayer and the one they next make. But the intellectual and emotional roots of religion lie deep in the human soul, so deep that in spite of innumerable changes in our beliefs and our ways of living religion persists. Even the individuals who seem least interested in it have a strange habit of revealing, on occasion, a genuine and deeply moving concern over the things unseen and eternal.

I think about God
Yet I talk of small matters,
Isn't it odd
How my idle tongue chatters?
Of quarrelsome neighbors,
Fine weather and rain,
Indifferent labors,
Indifferent pain,
Some trivial style
Fashion shifts with a nod . . .
And yet all the while
I am thinking of God.[5]

It is with a frank statement of these facts that we must begin our discussion of the present religious situation. We must recognize at the outset that religion has always been undergoing change, and that our problems—though different in nature from those of our predecessors—are probably no more serious. We must realize that religious faith and religious institutions have persisted amid the innumerable changes of a long past, and that presumably they will persist through the many changes of a long future. They have endured, and they will endure, because they satisfy deep-seated human needs. Christianity will not perish in our time. It will change, as it has

[5] Gamaliel Bradford in *Shadow Verses* (Yale University Press).

been changing in each of the successive crises of the last nineteen centuries. We must not lose our courage and our perspective, and join the familiar group of those who prophesy its death. Rather, expecting the changes that are inevitable in a growing world, we must try to understand the transformation that is now taking place within Christianity, and seek to carry the best from the old world of yesterday into the new world of to-morrow.

II

What, now, are the new situations emerging within Protestantism? Many people, confronted by that question, assert that we are now witnessing a significant drift of the younger generation from the organized forms of religion. Never before, these individuals assure us, have young people shown such indifference toward the Church. Never before has it been so difficult to induce children to attend religious services. Is this the significant development in modern Protestantism?

Here again the study of history proves instructive. Under date of February 6, 1838, Professor Edward Everett wrote in his journal the record of a conversation he had had that morning with President Josiah

Quincy of Harvard. Both men were greatly disturbed by the spirit of rebellion rife among the undergraduates, a rebellion directed chiefly against the exercises held in the college chapel. Professor Everett wrote, "President Quincy passed half an hour with me to-day explaining the providential discovery of a most outrageous attempt to blow the roof off the college library. He also explained the case relative to the recent explosion in the college chapel." [6] What had happened in the chapel we learn from the diary of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, then an undergraduate. He wrote, "What a sight chapel presented at prayers this morning! About two hundred panes of glass blown out, the hands of the clock torn off and the dial stove in, the front panels of the pulpit gone, and the damask between the pillars torn away. On the wall someone had written, 'A bone for Old Quin to pick!' " Old Quin was, of course, Josiah Quincy, President of the institution. The students of that day were, apparently, not too enthusiastic over organized religion.

Early conditions at Yale were quite as unpromising. When Timothy Dwight became President there in

[6] See P. R. Frothingham, *Edward Everett, Orator and Statesman*, Chapter X.

1795 he found the college church in a desperate situation. At the first communion service he conducted, only three undergraduates took the sacrament, and in 1798 only two could be persuaded to enroll as members of the college church. Meantime the great majority of the students announced their conversion to atheism and many of them adopted as nicknames the names of the leading free-thinkers of the time.[7] Those who are distressed by reports now emanating from our college campuses, and those who are alarmed by the pessimistic utterances of semi-successful parish ministers, should recall these records of long ago. Youthful indifference toward the Church and toward religious services is nothing new. Our present ecclesiastical situation, and the current plaint that the younger generation is deserting organized religion, represent old rather than new difficulties.

If we are to locate the significant changes now taking place in the Protestant world we must look deeper. Perhaps it will help us in this effort if we recall the fact that there are to-day, as there always have been, four distinct groups within the Protestant constituency. The first is made up of those who are

[7] See W. W. Sweet, *The Story of Religions in America*, pp. 322-323.

only mildly interested in religion or frankly indifferent to it. These individuals form the bulk of the Protestant population to-day, as they have undoubtedly done since the time of Martin Luther. The second group is made up of those who are thoroughly satisfied with the traditional form of Christian belief and practice. These defenders of the old system are found in practically every denomination and in practically every section of the country. In size this conservative group is easily the second of the four. The third group is made up of those who are not content with the Protestantism of yesterday, and who seek to establish beliefs and practices which will be more accurately adjusted to and more fully congruent with the new wisdom and the new life of our own time. These progressives too are found in practically every denomination, though their strength varies greatly in different sects and in different parts of the country. Their greatest power lies in their profound influence on college students. The fourth group in our Protestant world (if it should be included in our analysis) is made up of the individuals who are definitely antagonistic to all religion, even liberal religion. These men and women are convinced that belief in God is a relic of ancient animism, that the hope of personal immortality is a fanciful dream,

and that the alleged sense of divine help is a psychological delusion created by the believer's ardent expectation. These radicals are willing to teach and support a system of individual and social ethics. They hope, however, to overthrow distinctively religious beliefs and to discredit the religious part of the Church's work.

If there are significant changes under way in the Protestant world they will reveal themselves most clearly in the third of the groups just mentioned. The first group is indifferent to the entire venture of religion, the second is convinced that changes are dangerous and should be suppressed, and the fourth is determined to make a radical division between religion and ethics, retaining the second but rejecting the first. If, now, we turn to the remaining group—that portion of Protestantism which is consciously and courageously progressive—what significant changes do we see? At what points do its ideas and its ideals, its ruling beliefs and practices, differ from those of the orthodox Protestantism of yesterday?

III

To begin with, we note within this group the emergence of a new attitude toward the Bible and a new method of using the Bible. From this main

source flow, as the critics of the liberal group rightly assert, most of the changes which the liberals seek to introduce into Christian thought and practice.

According to nineteenth-century orthodoxy the Bible was a divinely inspired and therefore inerrant book from which an intelligent reader could secure authoritative information on many subjects, chiefly (though not entirely) subjects dealing with religion and ethics. Because, according to the theory, God is the ultimate author of every part of the Bible, the Bible invariably agrees with itself. What seem to be contradictions or misstatements prove on closer examination to be supplementary accounts of the same incident, or trivial flaws that crept into the narrative after the original words were written. Thus if a major statement is made by the Bible it can be regarded as infallibly and permanently true, and if a man seeks wisdom on the major problems of life and destiny he needs only study the Scripture. There the enlightenment he craves is waiting for him.

This familiar point of view was recently expressed by a writer of our own day who defends the ancient belief. Speaking of the Bible he says, "The Wonder Book! A Book of supernatural origin, supernatural

history, and supernatural future. It records the past, reveals the present, and predicts the future. Without apology, and with no other reason than its 'Thus saith the Lord!' the Bible freely contradicts all ancient and modern *human* teachings. It strikes at the vitals of all idolatry, polytheism, pantheism, materialism, agnosticism, and evolution. Here is a Book the teachings of which all the wisdom of the ages has not been able to improve. Neither the most learned philosopher nor the profoundest sage has revealed error of fact or teaching on its pages. So wonderful is this Book that it caused the great Gladstone to say of one small portion of it, 'All the wonders of Greek civilization heaped together are less wonderful than this single Book of Psalms.' " [8]

The liberal group within modern Protestantism takes, as most of us realize, an entirely different attitude toward the Bible. Years of patient and painstaking research have convinced the leaders of this group that the Bible is not the inerrant and permanently authoritative volume nineteenth-century orthodoxy claimed. Rather the Bible is a collection of ancient religious writings, writings which disclose the progress of religious and ethical thought over a

[8] Fred J. Meldau, *The Miracle Man and the Wonder Book.*

period of more than ten centuries. In studying the Bible we must employ the same methods which we use in studying any piece of ancient literature. Some of its statements prove to be permanently and profoundly true. They have become part of the accepted wisdom of our race, and they deserve to remain forever in the minds of men. Some of its statements are true in part and under certain conditions. If we seek to apply these statements in modern life we must analyze and evaluate them with the greatest care. Still other statements in the Bible—such as the statement that disease is caused by demons—are now recognized as false, and must be quietly laid aside. The attempt to read the Bible literally and then apply its statements uncritically to the new situations in the modern world must result, so the liberals maintain, in confusion and disaster. In studying the Bible and appropriating its elements of wisdom we should distinguish between the portions of the Bible which have proved permanently true and helpful, and the portions which have now proved erroneous. Then we must ask whether God has given, in these later centuries, still more light on the problems before us, and whether the teaching of the Bible can be supplemented or even revised by the wisdom flowing

from this ampler revelation of truth and this wider experience of life. Then, analyzing our modern problems carefully, we should apply to them the wisdom of the Bible, expanded or even corrected by the wisdom humanity has gained since the Bible was written. These are the beliefs, the attitudes, and the practices of the liberal group. They are precipitating within the Protestant world changes which, for extent and ultimate significance, are unparalleled since the Reformation.

The second major change evident in liberal circles is the gradual disappearance of the system of doctrine current in the last century. That system was built up during a period of many centuries and reached its first major formulation in the teaching of Augustine. Nearly one thousand years later it attained a still more impressive and detailed expression in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, on whose conclusions the Roman Catholic Church of to-day bases many of its doctrines. From Catholicism this system of doctrine passed to early Protestantism, and in the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin it gained its first and most influential Protestant expression. From these men these beliefs flowed to Protestant leaders everywhere, and through these leaders they were passed

on to the rank and file of the Protestant constituency. The ultimate defense of their validity, for both the Catholic and the Protestant groups, was the fact that they were deduced from the Bible, coupled with the fact that the Bible was regarded as the inerrant Word of God. On this foundation stone—the infallibility of Scripture—this vast structure of doctrine, a structure that has lasted for more than nineteen centuries, was built. Its development was one of the major triumphs of the human mind, applying itself to the problem of drawing from a sacred book a philosophy of history and a rule of life.

It is now evident that this ancient and impressive system of doctrine is—as far as the liberal Protestant group is concerned—fading, and fading fast. Such a change was, of course, inevitable. When the old attitude toward the Bible and the old method of using the Bible gave place to the new attitude and the new method, the system of doctrine based on the former was doomed. John Calvin's beliefs, and the modified version of them which was current in the nineteenth century, could no more endure than a house can endure when the foundation on which it rests is pulled away. In our time we see everywhere the results of this momentous change. We find thou-

sands of young people who admit frankly they can no longer believe, as their grandparents and parents did, that Adam brought sin and death into the world, and that Jesus some centuries later purchased by a voluntary sacrifice of himself eternal life for a few. This belief, as the young people willingly confess, has been made impossible for them by their new understanding of the stories in Genesis and their knowledge of the influences which determined Paul's interpretation of the death of Jesus. We also find in the modern world thousands of older people who, losing confidence in the literal accuracy of Bible verses, are now hopelessly perplexed when they speculate about God and immortality. The doubts and uncertainties of our time, evident chiefly in the groups influenced by modern liberals, are directly traceable to the far-reaching change in human beliefs precipitated by the new attitude toward the Bible and the new way of using the Bible. To attempt to lead all these confused individuals back to the old convictions is as foolish as to try to rebuild, on no foundation at all, a house that has collapsed because its original foundation disintegrated. For thousands of our contemporaries the old beliefs can never be restored. They can never be restored because the underlying convictions

on which they rested have been utterly destroyed and can never be reassembled. What the liberal Protestantism of our day must do, if it is to meet the spiritual need of our generation, is to find a new foundation for its faith, and then on that new foundation erect a structure which will contain as many of the old beliefs as can be salvaged from the present wreckage.

All this suggests the third major change we find going on within the liberal Protestant group to-day. We see numberless attempts to formulate a new interpretation of the Christian gospel which will take the place of the old. Sometimes these ventures are frank and outspoken, sometimes they are cautiously limited to the effort to make only minute changes in the old teaching, sometimes they resolve themselves into the strange attempt to prove that all the new beliefs were secretly present in the old. To one who is familiar with the slow and uncertain way in which great changes take place in the realm of thought, these efforts are evidences of the vast revolution in belief which is now taking place. What the new and generally accepted liberal Christianity of to-morrow will be no one of us can say. But a study of

the books and sermons now being written by liberals would seem to indicate that four major convictions lie at the basis of progressive Protestant belief to-day, and that presumably they will be part of the structure of the ampler Protestant faith of to-morrow.

The first of these convictions is that there is, at the heart of the universe, a living, loving God. In His sight human beings are infinitely precious, far too precious to be destroyed. This conviction the liberals of our time share with Jesus, and because of that fact they feel they have the right to call themselves Christians—that is, followers of Jesus. The second of their convictions is that this living, loving God initiated the vast growth-process which we term the process of evolution. Through it He called into being the inorganic world, then covered that world with living creatures, and finally brought forth the human race. This conviction is gained, of course, from modern science. It was utterly unknown to the men who wrote the Bible, and to the men who made the first formulations of the Christian view of life. The third conviction of the liberals is that the purpose of our existence on the Earth is the development of the finer mental and spiritual powers hidden within us. God

has, the liberals believe, put us here with a definite end in view—that we should learn to think, learn to achieve and create, and learn to understand and help each other. In this development of wise and kindly character, this perfecting of the personality, lie the purpose and the opportunity of our present existence. The final conviction of the liberals is that before every human being God will open, beyond death, a new life that will be literally endless. We shall begin that second phase of our existence with the mental and spiritual powers gained in this first phase. If, thanks to struggle and self-discipline, we win a fine self in this life, that self will be our imperishable possession and glory in the next life. If, as a result of inertia or deliberate sin, we gain here only a wretched and half-ignorant self, we shall be handicapped to that extent as we enter the new world. Immortality is not a boon which God may give or deny after a man has died. It is the man's inalienable birthright and sobering responsibility from the instant he emerges into this world.

How these four major convictions will be modified and expanded in the years to come no one can say. Into what system of belief and practice they will eventually be wrought no one knows. But that they

are here now, and that they are emerging with greater and greater clearness in the preaching and the writing of our liberal Protestant leaders, no one can deny. In the years ahead—how soon we do not know—it is almost inevitable that a man or a group of men will carry Protestant thought forward to the station beyond Martin Luther and John Calvin. In the past there has always been, sooner or later, a synthesis between secular knowledge and religious faith. At the present time there is a lamentable discrepancy between the two. The predicament of numberless students, drawn in one direction by their scientific knowledge and pulled in the opposite direction by their inherited faith, is a tragic indication of that fact. Eventually this conflict will be resolved, and resolved not because science surrenders but because religion welcomes the new truth God has revealed and moves forward in the light of that revelation.

Old gods, be gone! The rosy east is waking,
And in the dawn your shapes of clay are shaking,
Ye broke men's hearts, and now your own are breaking.

Over all lands a wingèd hope is flying,
It goes without reproof, without replying,
It bears God's courage to the dulled and dying.

The rusted chain that bound the world is broken,
A new, strange star pricks down the night for token,
And the Great Word is waiting to be spoken! [9]

IV

While these changes—some positive and some negative—have been taking place in the religious world, other changes of equal significance have been taking place in the secular world. In order to understand the pervasive doubt of our time we must understand not only the break-up of the old faith and the emergence of the new, but also the attack made on both by the aggressive skepticism of to-day. We have just enumerated the four new convictions emerging within liberal Protestantism. It is interesting to put beside them the four antithetical beliefs of modern skeptics, and note how sharp the conflict is. When we analyze the doubts of the modern world we find those doubts are precipitated in part by the break-up of the old faith and in part by the utterly contradictory view of life offered by at least some of the scientists and philosophers of our time. What are the ruling ideas of this group?

To begin with, skepticism claims that there is no

[9] Edwin Markham in *Star Points* (Houghton Mifflin, 1925), p. 219.

living, loving God at the heart of things. That belief, according to the skeptics, is a relic of the animistic philosophy which peopled the entire universe with unseen spirits. Human beings are, and have always been, utterly alone in an alien, uncaring world. The voice they have seemed to hear from the empty sky has been an echo of their call rather than an answer to it. From this first belief of modern skepticism the second follows logically. The process of evolution was, according to the skeptics, not initiated by God. It originated in sheer chance. Millions of years ago the situation happened to be exactly right, and in ways we can neither understand nor explain the vast growth-process set itself in operation. The human race, and all the institutions it has called into being, are the unforeseen end-products of that blind and fortuitous development. The third belief of modern skepticism is the outgrowth of the first two. Because there is no God at the heart of things, and because the life-process is the result of chance, there is no underlying meaning in human existence. Instead of being immortal souls struggling to grow mentally and spiritually men and women are only insignificant fragments of organic matter that stir for an instant of time before they are hastily and relent-

lessly dissolved back into the chemical elements from which they were originally compounded. The final belief of modern skepticism is apparent from the first three, particularly the third. The skeptics of our time deny flatly the possibility of the survival of individual personalities after death. They admit that a man's influence can and does survive. In the case of a great man it may endure for centuries. They confess that if a man has children, and they in turn have children, that the man lives on in his descendants. But the notion that the man himself, apart from his influence and his offspring, can continue his existence as an individual entity seems to the skeptics utterly incredible. As one of their number states frankly, "I believe that when I die I shall rot." [10]

How does the strange drama of human life appear to the men who adopt this philosophy? Bertrand Russell writes frankly, "We see, surrounding our narrow raft illuminated by the flickering light of human companionship, the dark ocean on whose rolling waves we toss for a brief hour. From the great night without, a chill blast breaks in upon our refuge. All the loneliness of humanity, caught amid hostile forces, is concentrated on the individual soul, which

[10] Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe*, p. 13.

must struggle, with what courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and its fears." [11] Whether we agree or disagree with the men who hold this theory of life, we must give them credit for following their logic to its bitter and lonely end, and viewing the world in the gray light and under the drab forms which their philosophy implies.

V

As we now turn to a more detailed study of the doubts that perplex the thoughtful people of our time we shall find in those doubts traces of all these complex influences. We shall see evidences of the new attitude toward the Bible and the resultant break-up of old beliefs. We shall see suggestions of the new faith of liberal Protestantism, and also evidences of the uncertainty created by modern skepticism. Again and again we shall hear these inquiries: Can the Christian beliefs, admittedly beautiful and inspiring, be proved true? On what foundation do their brave affirmations rest? It is in this welter of conflicting forces that the doubts of the

[11] Bertrand Russell. Quoted by Walter Lippmann in *A Preface to Morals*, p. 27.

modern world are engendered. It is amid this confusion that the Christian leaders of our time must speak, speak quietly and intelligently. It is through this darkness that these leaders must guide us and our children toward a new and a more satisfying faith.

CHAPTER II

THE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY IN MODERN RELIGION

I

RECENTLY a man came to me to seek help on a religious question perplexing his mother. He said, "My mother is now in the seventies, and she realizes she has not many years of life left. She is becoming increasingly concerned over death and what comes after. Apparently she is not afraid to die, but as the days pass she is more and more eager to gain some definite knowledge of what lies beyond. She reads many books on immortality, but so far she has found none that gives the light she craves. She attends church regularly, hoping every Sunday that the minister will say something about the nature of the next life. But invariably she comes home disappointed." Then with touching earnestness this man added, "If you can tell me of any book that will answer my mother's questions I shall be immensely grateful to you."

A century ago a minister could have dealt with that situation easily. He would have given the questioner a Bible and told him to study it carefully. There, in passages scattered through the Old Testament and the New, were (so the minister believed) detailed and authoritative descriptions of the next world. By combining these statements any intelligent person could learn what lies beyond death. Before the advent of Protestantism it was even easier to answer such questions. When a medieval Catholic became disturbed about the future life he had only to ask his priest for information. From the priest he could learn what the divinely taught and inerrant Church had to reveal. He could discover not only the nature of heaven and hell but also learn what to do to attain one and escape the other.

In our modern world there are numberless people who still accept one or the other of these ancient authorities. There are Protestants who still count the words of the Bible infallibly true, and Catholics who are ready to believe without question what their Church teaches. But beyond these two groups there is a large and apparently ever-increasing group which cannot trust the old authorities in the old way. These men and women cannot feel that the Bible is a source

book of inerrant information even on subjects relating to religion, or believe that there is an ecclesiastical organization which has been divinely empowered to make infallible pronouncements. For these individuals the old sources of religious knowledge are now inadequate and unsatisfying. Yet the old questions still emerge in these minds, just as they emerged in the mind of that elderly woman whose plight we were just describing. What is the task thus forced on the Christianity of our time? It is to find a new source of authority in religion, and then move the vast structure of Christian faith and practice from the old foundation to the new. A gigantic undertaking? Not since the days of Martin Luther has Christianity faced such a problem.

Until this work is finished the confusion of the modern world will undoubtedly continue. Consider the bewilderment of many of our contemporaries over questions of right and wrong. Recently a New York mother published a magazine article [1] bearing the strange title "What shall we tell the children?" She confessed frankly that she was no longer sure what she could say to her daughter about right and wrong, or whether as a matter of fact she could say

[1] In *Harper's Magazine*, April, 1929.

anything. Here are her own words: "It is idle to tell girls to-day that men won't like them if they do certain things. On every side they see other girls violating the taboos and ending up in the odor of sanctity and orange-blossoms. Neither can we tell boys that success is wholly a matter of hard work, clean living, and personal integrity. We ourselves now know better. All about us we see men with vulgar and immature minds inheriting the earth. Preachers may explain the fact as they will, but the rising generation is no longer interested in or convinced by what it terms 'the old hokum.' I think if we were to tell our children frankly that we too are bewildered by these ethical problems, and that we too are uncertain what is right, the children might be interested to make intellectual excursions with us and help us find satisfying solutions to our difficulties." Could you help that mother and her daughter by giving them a Bible, or by advising them to listen to the pronouncements of a Church? Probably not. They and thousands of people like them have lost confidence in the old authorities. The likelihood is they will remain in a state of sorry confusion until some new authority is discovered and put in place of the old.

II

Have we any notion what this new authority will be? Before we attempt to answer that question there are two facts which should be stated clearly. The first is that we need only a small amount of absolute certainty, either in the field of religion or that of ethics. We can leave numberless questions unanswered, and still live bravely, happily, wisely, and effectively. Modern science offers an interesting illustration of this principle. As science has disclosed more and more truths about our universe we have come to realize that the world is, in its ultimate aspects, a profound mystery. There are nearly two thousand million of us creeping about on the thin shell of a little globe spinning tirelessly through space. Where did that Earth come from? Where is it going? What is it intended to do? No one can tell us. Will it maintain its motion forever, or will it gradually lose momentum and slide helplessly into that central furnace we call the Sun? No one knows. Our range of certainty is painfully small.

Human beings prove quite as baffling as the Earth on which they walk. How is it that by desiring to move my hand I suddenly possess the power to move it? What is the connection between a purpose in my

mind and the muscles in my arm? No one has fully solved that riddle. What is the force operating through the laws of heredity? Why does a boy so often reach the same height, gain the same weight, and develop the same disposition as his father? Here again our knowledge soon stops. Or consider the miracle of memory. Twenty years ago you saw a tiny house in Capri with an orange tree beside the door. During all these months you have thought nothing of that experience. Now something recalls it, and you suddenly see the house, the tree, and the oranges as clearly as you saw them two decades ago. What brought that picture back in vivid completeness? What is the energy that flowed down the memory tracks in the gray matter of your brain to recreate that scene? How do the millions of memory tracks keep themselves distinct from one another, and save you from confusing your past experiences? Here are questions no one can answer. Here our baffled minds meet blank walls of mystery.

Yet even if we cannot explain life, even if we cannot answer all the questions life thrusts before us, we can live. We can live bravely, happily, wisely, and effectively. We can draw help and inspiration from our memories even if the process of remembering is

a mystery. We can love our children and help them become fine men and women even though the force that gave them to us and made them so like us is a riddle. We can conquer the Earth and make it disclose its hidden treasures even though we have little idea how the Earth began its development or when that development will end. The experience of the scientists proves that we need only a small amount of absolute certainty. We can do our work, we can find happiness, we can make our way through the years, even though our tiny circle of illuminated assurance is surrounded by a vast night of utter darkness.

The Christianity of to-morrow will have to face a similar situation and learn a similar lesson. It will have to confess that there are mysteries it cannot fathom, questions it cannot answer, detailed assurances it cannot give. Then, with science, it will go on to tell men that even if they cannot understand life they can live triumphantly. Even if they cannot describe God they can love Him and serve Him. Even if they cannot answer every question about right and wrong they can find the path of honor and follow it. Even if they cannot draw a picture of the next world they can say confidently there is such a world.

In science the range of knowledge is clearly limited. Why should we be disturbed when we find a similar situation holds true in religion?

III

The other significant fact we must mention is this. We can discover truth even if we do not have supernatural authorities to tell us what truth is. We can discover truth by applying our intelligence to the facts of life and the long record of human experience. As we do this, truth gradually but invariably discloses itself to us.

This is, of course, the method science has followed. No supernatural authorities revealed to the early scientists their store of facts. No divinely dictated book, no infallible organization, stood beside them in their efforts. The immense enlightenment for which we must thank these men did not come through revelation. It came from the application of human intelligence to the facts of life and the long record of human experience.

Consider the story of our discovery of the truth about thunderstorms.[2] Primitive races believed that

[2] See A. D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, I, 336-350.

thunderstorms were the work of supernatural agencies—either good gods who were temporarily angry, or evil spirits who were permanently hostile. The early Romans followed the first theory, saying when a storm arose that Jupiter was enraged and was about to hurl one of Vulcan's thunderbolts at a foe. Medieval Christians followed the second theory, claiming that thunderstorms were the work of evil spirits. Thomas Aquinas, the most influential theologian of the Middle Ages, wrote, "It is a dogma of faith that demons can produce wind, storms, and rains of fire from heaven." Martin Luther went further and declared that devastating winds *were* evil spirits, evil spirits that had assumed the form of a tempest in their desire to work harm. How, on such a theory, could a Christian drive away the demons and the storms? The simplest and easiest way was to ring a consecrated bell. You and I, listening to church bells, imagine they were originally devised to call men to worship. Nothing of the kind! Their chief purpose was to drive away demons. An old bell in Italy still bears this quaint inscription, "The sound of this bell vanquishes tempests, repels demons, and summons men." It is significant that the effect of

the bell on the winds and the evil spirits receives first mention.

How did the scientists lead men away from these century-old superstitions? Not by appealing to a supernatural authority. As a matter of fact the two authorities claiming supernatural sanction were vigorously opposed to the scientists. Yet in the end science over-ruled the teaching of the Bible and the Church, and led mankind into a new era of intelligence, courage, and power. What brought the new wisdom? Human intelligence, applied patiently and heroically to the facts of life and the long record of human experience.

IV

All this makes plain the conviction many liberals now hold. They are convinced that the Christianity of to-morrow will rely upon the same authority which science has been employing with ever-increasing success for many centuries. It will rely upon human intelligence, applied to facts and experience. Already many of the Christians of to-day are appealing frankly and openly to this ultimate source of truth. When the Bible says that epilepsy is caused by

demons, and human intelligence applied to facts and experience says it is caused by an obscure disease of the body, these men and women quietly but resolutely reject the Bible and follow intelligence. When an ecclesiastical group, either ancient or modern, makes a solemn pronouncement these individuals compare the ecclesiastical utterance with the witness of fact and experience, and then, if there is a conflict between the two authorities, quietly follow the latter. In the coming years this procedure will be more and more widely followed. Eventually a time will come when the liberal wing of Christianity will confess openly that it has shifted from the old authorities to the new. The religious beliefs and codes of conduct taught in that day will be taught, not because they can be traced back to the words of Scripture or the pronouncements of an ecclesiastical organization, but because they are in accord with the findings of intelligence based on the evidence of experience. Will this new authority give us complete certainty on all matters? Obviously not. Repeatedly the human mind finds itself confronted by questions which, at the moment at least, it cannot answer. But humanity learned long ago that it does not need complete

knowledge. On a small foundation of absolute certainty it can raise the structure of a brave faith and a heroic, effective life.

Does this mean that the Christianity of to-morrow will abandon the Bible and reject the pronouncements of the Church? Certainly not. When the statements of the Bible agree with the conclusions reached by enlightened minds those statements will be accepted, as they are to-day. What man in his senses would deny the truth of such a profound saying as this: "With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again"? [3] When the statements of the Bible contradict the findings of intelligence and experience those statements will be quietly laid aside, as they are to-day. What educated man of our time will accept the implications of the ancient injunction, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"? [4] The same principle will hold true of ecclesiastical manifestoes, old and new. Where they accord with the conclusions of intelligence and experience they will be accepted. Where they contradict those conclusions they will be disregarded. Here is the new foundation on which the religious beliefs and the ethical codes of the future will rest. Here is the authority to which

[3] Matthew vii. 2.

[4] Exodus xxii. 18.

we must appeal to-day if we are to answer the questions of the thoughtful people of our time.

V

In actual practice does the new source of authority prove adequate? Do intelligence and experience tell us all we need to know about right and wrong, about God, and about immortality? Or in the end must we have recourse in these matters to revelation?

In the case of ethical problems the answer is obvious. Intelligence and experience disclose clearly the major moral certainties. They reveal how codes of conduct arose, why right acts are right, and why wrong acts are wrong. In primitive times the ethical questions that now perplex men were unknown. They were unknown because few human beings were present on the Earth, and because the people who were here lived in tiny, isolated groups. Nothing like the complex community life we know had developed. But as the centuries passed and the number of human beings increased, families gathered in the more favorable localities and the venture of group life began. Immediately new conduct problems emerged. Should each man in the community respect the property of every other, or could the old practice of indiscrimi-

nate plundering persist? Should each member of the group agree to tell the truth to his neighbor, or could everyone lie as freely as his ancestors had usually done? Should every man respect the home of every other and resolutely control his own sexual desires, or would the freer habits of an earlier day prove adequate in the new situation? As these questions arose codes of conduct inevitably developed. Men learned from long and bitter experience that there were certain ways of living which usually resulted in disaster, not only for the individual most intimately concerned but also for many innocent people in the vicinity. They discovered there were other ways of living and acting which tended to produce happiness, happiness for everyone. The first courses of action they called wrong—that is, socially harmful. The others they called right—that is, socially helpful. It was like locating the right trail and the wrong trail around a mountain. The right trail was the one which in practice brought travelers surely, safely, and quickly to their destination. The wrong trail was the one which led those who followed it astray.

Here is the correct approach to the ethical problems which perplex many of the people of our time.

Why is it wrong to steal? Not because the Bible says so. It was wrong to steal long before the Bible was written. It is wrong to steal because centuries of experience have shown that if everyone steals, or if even a sizable proportion of the people in the community steal, a happy and a stable group life is impossible. Why is it wrong to tell lies? Not because the Church forbids it. Lying was wrong centuries before the Church came into existence. Lying was wrong then and lying is wrong now because it imperils community life. Why is adultery wrong? Why has society set up so many prohibitions in the field of sex-relationship, marriage, and family life? Because society has learned from long and bitter experience that there are certain ways of controlling the relations between the sexes which, in the main, result in happiness for everyone, particularly for children. There are other ways of living which, in the main, produce hardship and misery, particularly for children. The Seventh Commandment is not the thing that makes adultery wrong. It is the constitution of the community, the nature of human beings, that make it wrong. A right act is nothing more nor less than an act which tends to enrich and fortify the life of the group. A wrong act is nothing more nor less

than an act which has proved in actual experience socially harmful.

The new authority will also tell us all we actually need to know about God. It will not tell us all we should like to know, but it will give us an adequate foundation for a life of trust, courage, and heroic achievement. Consider the facts which intelligence, studying the record of experience, now puts before us. We realize, to begin with, that ours is a world of unfailing order. Each new telescope discloses fresh suns and stars, but every one of them moves with incredible precision through the vast emptiness of Space. Each new microscope reveals hitherto unknown marvels of pattern, form, and orderly process in the infinitesimal particles that are the building stones of our universe. More surprising still, we now realize that our world—though growing and changing and renewing itself constantly—has the ability to keep itself in order. It is in order to-day, and it will be in order again to-morrow, though during the night the numberless elements out of which it is composed will change extensively. Could such a world be the result of a gigantic fluke? Can this persistent order be explained on the theory that blind energies called the universe into being and still re-

main in control? To some of us such a theory seems unconvincing. To us there seems clear evidence of a Directive Intelligence, a Mind and a Power and a Goodness we call God. Why do we believe in His reality? Not because we have the assurance of the Bible or the pronouncements of the Church. Rather because intelligence and experience point more clearly toward this conclusion than toward any other.

Can the new authority tell us anything about death and what lies beyond? Can a minister who trusts intelligence and experience bring any word of assurance to a person who, like that elderly woman whom we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, seeks light on the problem of immortality? Obviously the new authority cannot give such detailed information as the two ancient authorities claimed to give. Intelligence, studying the record of experience, can say literally nothing about the *nature* of a world other than this. But intelligence can give the assurance that death does not mark the end of our existence. Intelligence has convinced us that our universe is a reasonable and an orderly place, and that within it there is a God of wisdom, power, and love. What conclusion can we draw from these facts? Such a world would not destroy its finest product—human

personalities. It would not struggle for millions of years to carry the evolutionary process upward to a point at which life could blossom into a heart like Lincoln's, a mind like Plato's, and a love like Jesus', and then ruthlessly and permanently destroy all it had created. A reasonable world would not operate in that way. A God of wisdom, love, and power would not follow such a procedure. Rather some type of further life, some sort of permanence, would be given to the selves produced with such effort and revealing such possibilities of achievement and growth. Granted that we do not know, and cannot learn, what the nature of the next existence will be. It is enough that we have assurance of its reality. We can live bravely and nobly in this life, and face the inevitable sunset unafraid. Beyond that sunset there will be, we are convinced, an equally inevitable dawn.

I have known the silence of the stars and of the sea,
And the silence of the city when it pauses,
And the silence of a man and a maid,
And the silence for which music alone finds the word,
And the silence of the woods before the winds of spring
begin,
And the silence of the sick
When their eyes roam about the room.

And I ask: For the depths
Of what use is language?
We are voiceless in the presence of realities,
We cannot speak.

There is the silence of Lincoln
Thinking of the poverty of his youth,
And the silence of Napoleon
After Waterloo,
And the silence of age
Too full of wisdom for the tongue to utter it
In words intelligible to those who have not lived
The great range of life.

And there is the silence of the dead . . .
If we who are in life cannot speak
Of profound experiences
Why do you marvel that the dead
Do not tell you of death?
Their silence shall be interpreted
As we approach them.[5]

[5] Edgar Lee Masters, "Silence" (Excerpts). In *Songs and Satires* (Macmillan).

CHAPTER III

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

I

FIVE years ago the students at Wellesley invited a prominent clergyman to give at the college a series of addresses on modern religious beliefs. In the effort to determine what subjects concerned the undergraduates most a questionnaire containing a long list of topics was circulated. Which questions did the students want to hear discussed? When the returns came in four subjects proved to have a special appeal.

"What is the modern conception of God?"

"How can we bring the Christian spirit into modern life?"

"How can we get along more successfully with other people?"

"What is the meaning of life?"

When the replies were analyzed closely a significant situation was disclosed. The last of these four topics had by far the greatest number of votes. As a matter

of fact it had nearly as many as the other three combined. "What is the meaning of life?" This was the question in which these students were most deeply interested.

In all frankness is this not the question most older people would like to have answered? Thoughtful adults are quite willing to omit further debates on the miracles recorded in the Bible, the relative merits of different denominations, and the present significance of the speculative doctrines worked out by our ancestors. But they would like to know whether there is any significant purpose in life as a whole, whether any golden thread of meaning runs through the innumerable and apparently unrelated events of history.

The reasons for this widespread concern are plain. During the last few decades science has been disclosing more and more facts about our world and the human beings that have emerged upon it. Many of these facts are immensely puzzling to reflective minds. Formerly men fancied they dwelt in a tiny cabin called the Earth, and that there were only a few other living creatures in its corners. Now we realize we are dwelling in an immense castle called the Universe, and that there are, above and below

and all about us, a hundred thickly populated chambers. Consider what science now tells us about the size of this castle. If an aviator were to start this noon on a nonstop flight to the sun, and if he were able to maintain a constant speed of two hundred miles per hour night and day, when would he reach his goal? Fifty-two years hence. But that flight, long as it may seem, would be only the beginning of a flight to the outposts of our universe. The trip to the sun would be only one fourteen-billionth of the flight to the farthest known star. What does a universe as vast as that mean? What is being accomplished within its huge boundaries? Or is there no significance to the innumerable processes going on?

Or recall the facts science has now disclosed about the life force and the numberless creatures it has called into being. Not many centuries ago men believed there were so few birds and animals that all of them were brought to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that he was able to give each its name. How quaint such a theory seems in the light of modern biological knowledge! We now realize that if Adam had attempted any such naming process he would have died of old age long before it was completed. How many animals would have gathered in

line before him? Over twenty-five thousand vertebrates, and ten times that number of invertebrates. The beetle family alone, with one hundred thousand distinct species, would have given Adam no small difficulty. These are the strange and innumerable manifestations of the life force, that mysterious energy which, after animals were scurrying everywhere on the Earth, called men and women into being. What is the meaning of such a world and such a life-process? Or have they no meaning at all?

II

Face to face with this question the thinkers of our time offer three different answers. Perhaps a fable will suggest what the answers are and how they are reached. Once upon a time three boys were playing in an attic. In an out-of-the-way corner they found a box filled with many fragments of cardboard, each cut into an intricate shape. One of the boys ventured the guess that the pieces formed a picture puzzle, and suggested that the three youngsters try to put it together. Promptly they knelt on the floor and began their effort. Some of the pieces had an obvious pattern and were readily fitted into place. But others were baffling and showed not the slightest inclina-

tion to fit into anything. Finally one of the boys clambered wearily to his feet. "This is a waste of time!" he exclaimed. "We can never put these pieces together. They aren't meant to go together anyway. Someone has thrown the pieces from a dozen different puzzles into this box. Probably no set was complete, and the person was trying to get rid of them all. It's a waste of time trying to put these pieces together. They don't fit, and what's more they aren't supposed to."

Then the second boy stood up. "I'm going to quit, too," he said. "These pieces may go together, but we're not smart enough to put them together. We might work for a week, but we'd never finish more than a corner of the puzzle. See how many pieces there are, and how complicated the pattern is! If this puzzle is ever put together someone with more time and more brains that we have will have to do the work."

Then the third boy spoke. "I think you're both wrong. I think this puzzle will go together, and I think we can put it together if we work long enough and hard enough. We've already finished one corner of the picture, and that corner gives an idea what the rest of the picture must be. It may take a long time

to put every piece in place, but I'm sure we can do it. You two can quit if you want to, but I'm going to stay here and work."

The meaning of that fable is plain. Science has put before us a million newly discovered facts, as varied and bewildering as the tiny pieces of an immense picture puzzle. Do all these facts fit together and form a coherent whole? Can they be assembled in such a way that a consistent meaning will emerge from them? That is the question which is now perplexing humanity. Many of our contemporaries take the attitude of the first boy in the fable. They insist that the pieces in the puzzle can never be put together for the simple reason they were never intended to go together. Life has, these men insist, no underlying and unified meaning. Millions of things happen, but between these fragments of experience there is no essential coherence. This is the theory which Mr. Joseph Wood Krutch advances with unmistakable skill. He writes,[1] "Formerly man believed that the universe is rational if he could only grasp the secret of its rationality. Now he is coming to suspect that rationality is an attribute of human beings alone, and that human life has no more mean-

[1] Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper*, p. 9.

ing than the life of the humblest insect that crawls from one annihilation to another." No wonder we have difficulty explaining life! There is no explanation to be found.

Other people take the attitude of the second boy in the fable. They tell us there may be an underlying meaning in life, but they add no human mind is great enough to discover what that meaning is. Down to the end of time humanity will be, these men assert, bewildered by existence. The underlying significance of the processes going on about us will elude our dim intelligence, as the significance of a printing press eludes the mental grasp of the mouse peering anxiously through a crack in the partition. This agnostic attitude appears in much modern poetry.

> The desire of love? Joy.
> The desire of life? Peace.
> The desire of the soul? Heaven.
> The desire of God? A flame-white secret forever.[2]

This poet admits there is a God, and implies that God has a purpose. But what that purpose is, the poet says, we shall never know. It will remain "a flame-white secret forever."

But some of us take the attitude of the third boy

[2] William Sharp.

in the fable. We are convinced there is a coherent purpose in life, that human minds are capable of discovering it, and that at least part of it has already been discerned. We maintain that some of the pieces in the vast picture puzzle have already been fitted into place, and that as time goes on the design they suggest will be revealed in completed splendor. We grant that portions of the puzzle are still unassembled, and that many individual pieces have not yet disclosed their significance. But we are convinced that life has a meaning, and that its meaning has begun to emerge clearly. There are three facts on which we base our conviction, and from which we draw our theory of the meaning of our existence here.

III

To begin with, it seems evident that the inanimate world is a vast and extraordinarily ingenious mechanism. The fact that living creatures roam over the machine, like passengers strolling the decks of an ocean liner, must not blind us to the fact that the physical universe is organized like a machine and operates in mechanical fashion. The fact that some of the world-processes involve living beings and even

call them into existence must not make us forget the essentially mechanical nature of the operations going on about us. Granted that we are acquainted with no other mechanism which can compare, either in size or ingenuity or skill of operation, with that mechanism we call the inanimate world. Granted that we are hopelessly puzzled when we attempt to explain how far mechanical operations affect the world of living creatures, particularly the human world. It still seems clear that the inanimate realm—the world of sea and land, sun and storm, matter and energy—is an immense and amazingly complicated machine.

This knowledge came, of course, at a relatively late date in history. Primitive men believed that every process in the natural world was not only watched over but actuated by an adjacent divinity. It was, so early men believed, a god who made the wind blow, another god who dragged the sun across the sky, and still another god who was responsible for the sprouting of the seed. Centuries passed before men realized that the action of the wind and the movements of the heavenly bodies were determined by mechanical forces acting in blind and relentless fashion. Still more centuries came and went before men understood even in part the mechanical processes leading

up to the emergence of living forms. But to-day the realization that the inanimate world is a mechanism which can be understood and the operations of which can be predicted and to a certain extent controlled, has come not only to scientists but to men on the street. They know how regular and how unfaltering are the movements of the sun and the stars, the rise and the fall of the tide, and the operations of those less obvious forces that maintain century after century the steady cycle of birth and growth, decay and death. This is the fact which science has been trying to establish ever since the animistic philosophy of the primitive world began to break down. It is the fact which the modern world has accepted, and to which any intelligent religious teaching must adjust itself.

But when we have granted with science that the inanimate world is a vast and ingenious mechanism we can go on and point out a second fact which is highly significant. A vast and ingenious mechanism invariably implies a creative mind and a coherent purpose. Mechanisms never put themselves together. They are never set up with no object in view. Behind a mechanism we can always discover, if we look far enough, a creative mind and a coherent purpose. The

more complicated the mechanism, and the more ingenious its ways of operating, the greater the certainty that intelligence put it together and put it together with a certain end in view.

If, walking through a wood, I come upon a log leaning against a tree in such a way that the slightest jar will make it fall on anything below, I might conclude that the apparent trapping-device was the product of sheer coincidence. Perhaps the log fell into that position against the tree. But when I visit a factory equipped with a sprinkler system and discover that a dozen water pipes are opened automatically the moment the temperature in the factory passes a certain point, then it becomes hard for me to believe that this complex and ingenious mechanism set itself up by chance. When, finally, I examine a radio, note the accurate arrangement of the different parts, and discover how skilfully the device is adjusted to the unseen vibrations thrown out by a distant broadcasting station, then I find it impossible to say that this third mechanism is the product of blind energies working fortuitously over a long period of time. Behind such a mechanism there must be, I realize, the mind of an inventor. For such a mechanism there must be a definite and coherent purpose. The radio,

I conclude, was deliberately and carefully put together, and put together in such a way that it would reproduce the music sent out from a broadcasting station.

These, frankly, are the arguments we advance when someone asserts there is no Mind behind the universe, or asserts there is no purpose in the vast and infinitely complex life-process. To us the evidence seems conclusive that there must be such a Mind, and that there must be such a purpose. The conclusion reached after centuries of study is that the world in which we find ourselves is an immense and an astonishingly ingenious machine. Such a mechanism implies a creative mind and a coherent purpose. The mind behind the universe we call God. The purpose fulfilling itself within the universe we call the meaning of life.

Can we discover what this purpose is? In dealing with mechanisms we have learned that their purpose discloses itself if we let them operate for a reasonable length of time and note the more important things that happen. Take, as an illustration, a grandfather clock. As it stands in the corner the purposes of its many constituent parts are not immediately apparent. But if we let the clock run for a certain

period of time those purposes gradually disclose themselves. We learn that the mechanism controlling the second hand is designed to record accurately the passing of seconds, that the purpose of the mechanism controlling the minute hand is to indicate the passing of minutes, and that the purpose of the mechanism controlling the hour hand is to show the passing of hours. If we watch the clock long enough the purposes of still other mechanisms will gradually disclose themselves. We learn that one mechanism is intended to record the passing of days, and still another—one that operates very slowly—is designed to indicate the changing phases of the moon. To discover the underlying purpose of the entire machine we must let it operate for a long period of time. Only then will we learn that days and weeks, as well as minutes and seconds, are accurately recorded.

During this period of observation we must also distinguish between the more important and the less important occurrences that take place. We find that a weight falls, that a pendulum swings, and that a persistent ticking sound is produced inside the mechanism. Is the purpose of the machine to make the weight fall, to make the pendulum swing, or to create

the ticking sound? Probably not. These are the less important things that happen, the accompaniments but not the objectives of the clock's operation. To say that these things represent the purpose of the clock would be as foolish as to claim that because an ocean liner burns coal the purpose of its voyage is to belch smoke from the funnels.

IV

Suppose, now, we turn to the vast mechanism we call the Earth. What is its purpose? The men of the past were unable to discover that purpose because their range of observation was inadequate. They had only the space of a single lifetime, or a few consecutive lifetimes, during which to watch the operations of the world-machine. Knowing nothing of scientific or historical research they were unable to study the world-process for more than a few years or at most a few decades. During this relatively brief period they were unable to detect the significance of the slower and the more important processes. Their predicament resembled that of a man who attempts to learn everything about a grandfather clock when he has only five seconds for observation. Such a man might detect the meaning of the second hand

and guess the meaning of the minute hand. But the purpose of the mechanisms indicating the successive days of the week and the successive phases of the moon would elude him completely.

In recent years scientific research and historical investigation have immensely enlarged our period of observation. We are now able to see, as no generation before ours did, what the world-mechanism has been doing for literally millions of years. This expansion of our observation period has disclosed the more important, as contrasted with the less important, achievements of the world-process. As we scan the thousands of centuries now unrolled before us, what do we see? A welter of relatively insignificant occurrences—the creation of millions of physical objects, the appearance and disappearance of many islands and continents, and the birth and death of uncounted living creatures. But amid all these less significant events there stand out three immensely important achievements. In them we can discern, some of us are convinced, the underlying purpose of the life-process.

The first great achievement was the appearance of human beings. They emerged very gradually from the subhuman world. They acquired with painful

slowness their characteristic powers. For centuries they were almost helpless in the face of the titanic energies of Nature. Yet these human creatures possessed the ability to do something no animal, no river system, no vast power of the inanimate world could do. They could think, plan, and then create in accordance with their plan. They could study the forces about them, learn their secrets, and eventually bring them under control. The creation of human beings with these unique powers was the first great achievement of the life-process.

The second achievement was the development within human beings of the spirit of kindness. Primitive men knew little or nothing of this spirit. For them cruelty was the rule, and brutal dominion over others the ideal. But after thousands of years of widening experience, and particularly after Jesus had thrust into human life his incomparable influence toward tenderness and considerateness, a new spirit began to appear. Men learned to be kind not only to their family and their friends, but kind to needy human beings everywhere—irrespective of race and religion, color and language. This new kindness made possible the emergence of a friendly, coöperative society. This in turn made possible a further

subjugation of the blind and often-hostile forces of Nature.

The third major event recorded in history was the development, almost within our own time, of scientific intelligence. Kindness could do and did do many great things. But kindness could not conquer the plague, or outwit famine, or find a cure for unemployment and poverty. Only intelligence based on scientific study could win these victories. To-day they are being won everywhere. The new combination of kindness and scientific intelligence promises to transform our entire world. These are the more important things that have happened as the world-mechanism has operated for millions of years. What is the purpose of that mechanism? What was the aim of the Creative Mind that called it into being and set it in operation? That purpose is disclosed by these major achievements of the world-process. That purpose was the development of a human race dominated more and more by the combination of kindness and intelligence.

Here is our theory of the meaning of life. This is the picture we are beginning to see as the innumerable pieces in the puzzle are fitted into place.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW CHRISTIAN EPIC

I

ONE of the current anthologies contains a vivid poem entitled "The Lion House." It pictures with extraordinary skill the restless movements of a lion as he tries to find the way out of his cage. Then, at the end of the poem, comes an unexpected comparison between the lion and ourselves. What if human beings too are caged? What if the universe is a prison, and some Greater Intelligence is watching us from beyond the bars?

> Always the heavy air,
> The dreadful cage, the low
> Murmur of voices where
> The Beast goes to and fro
> In an immense despair.
>
> As through a haunted brain,
> With tireless footfalls
> The Obsession moves again
> Trying the floor, the walls
> Forever . . . but in vain.

In vain, proud Force! A might
Shrewder than yours did spin
Around your rage that bright
Prison of steel, wherein
You pace for my delight.

And, O my heart, what Doom,
What Mightier Mind has wrought
The cage within whose room
Paces your burning thought?
For the delight of Whom? [1]

There are moments when every reflective person asks questions like these. What is the meaning of our life? Are we caged or free? Do we pace in endless circles, or do we make our way toward some great goal? Are we alone, or is there Someone Else who watches all we do? People who live on the surface of life may succeed in dodging these questions. But those who think, as well as eat and sleep, can never wholly disregard them.

Curiously enough, modern science has increased rather than decreased the element of mystery in life. Modern science has, to be sure, given us valuable information about many of the single processes going on in our world. It has shown us, for example, that

[1] John Hall Wheelock in *An Anthology of Magazine Verse* (1923), p. 360.

the apparent movement of the Sun through the sky is an illusion. The Earth is the thing that moves, spinning at the rate of a thousand miles an hour and hurtling through Space seventy-five times as fast as a cannonball. Science has shown that human beings are not special and recent creations as our ancestors believed. Rather they are the latest members of an ancient family of living creatures, a family that began its career in the shallow waters of a primeval sea, and that has been sending different members ever since into the water, over the land, and through the air. Science has given us these fragments of information, and millions of other fragments like them. For the accumulated light of these many little candles, a light that has enabled us to see at least part way through the darkness of life, we can never be too grateful.

Yet anyone who thinks carefully soon realizes that the ultimate mysteries of the universe are as dark and baffling as ever. We know it is the Earth that moves, forever circling around the Sun. But where did the two originate and why are they here at all? We realize that man has developed out of the lower forms of life, and that this development has involved an unimaginably long period of time. But toward what is man developing? Why was the strange process

started? The men of the Middle Ages faced a universe crammed with mysteries, but their situation was not half so puzzling as ours. To explain the immense and ever-evolving universe revealed by modern telescopes and microscopes is far more difficult than to explain a tiny world safely and permanently anchored beneath a solid sky.

II

In the attempt to answer these questions and devise some solution of the riddle of life each religion builds up a theory about the origin of the universe and an interpretation of humanity's long and strangely checkered history. The process of building this story involves a long period of time and the effort of many individuals. In the case of the traditional Christian theory at least seventeen centuries were spent devising, polishing, and perfecting the epic. The thinkers of some fifty generations contributed their wisdom to it, and facts and fancies drawn from many sources were fitted into its complex structure. The foundation of the theory rested on the speculations of still earlier thinkers, and involved beliefs worked out by numberless individuals during the pre-Christian era. We may well confess,

then, that the final form of the orthodox Christian epic was one of the supreme products of the human mind. The outline of the story was somewhat as follows.[3]

"At the beginning of things there was a celestial King who was surrounded by a court of wingèd messengers and musicians. He had existed from all eternity, and he had always intended when a certain time came to create living creatures who would be imperfect copies of himself. One day in 4004 B.C. the drama of human life suddenly began. In obedience to the word of the King the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, and the lower forms of life sprang into being. Then the first man was formed out of clay. As he lay in a deep sleep the King (or God, as he is usually known) took one of his ribs and fashioned it into the first woman. God then placed these two creatures in an orchard which He Himself had planted and in which He often walked during the cool of the day. But at the instigation of an evil Being called Satan the man and the woman disobeyed God's express command and ate the fruit of a forbidden tree. As a result they were banished

[3] The following statement is drawn in part from J. H. Randall, Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind,* pp. 18-20.

from that happy region and sent into a hostile world with a curse on their heads. Henceforth the man would have to earn his food by the sweat of his brow, and the woman would have to bear her children with intense pain and anguish. Furthermore those children and all their descendants would possess from the very instant of their conception the sinful nature their first parents had acquired by disobeying God. Then, as if to complete the fearful punishment visited on man, the Earth itself began to give evidences of the divine wrath. Disease, corruption, and death appeared on every side, and the normal span of human life—once nearly a thousand years—dwindled to seventy or eighty. Thus the fatal blunder of the first man and the first woman changed the entire course of history and brought into the world the suffering and heartache evident on every side.

"But God, not wishing to see all His hopes fail, devised an ingenious plan by which a few individuals would be saved from the universal doom. These men and women, the elect, were carefully chosen in advance and graciously assisted throughout their career. In the fulness of time God sent a divine being to complete the process of salvation for this small and highly favored group. That being was His own

son, who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, the miraculously born son of Mary. After a brief career marked by astonishing exhibitions of supernatural power, this God-Man died on Calvary. By his sufferings and death he paid, as far as the elect were concerned, the penalty for the sin committed centuries before by Adam. After three days in the grave, during which this divine redeemer visited the underworld and preached to the spirits waiting there, he returned to heaven and resumed his place at God's right hand. By this brief career on earth he had made it possible for the elect to escape the sentence of universal death and attain eternal life and joy.

"After a predetermined period of years has passed, this divine being will return to earth and institute the long-awaited world-judgment. Then the elect, both living and dead, will be taken upward to enjoy an eternity of bliss in regions of indescribable splendor. The rest of the human race, both living and dead, will be hurled downward into a fiery furnace where throughout eternity they will suffer excruciating torment. With this division of all the human creatures who have come into existence through the centuries, and with this inauguration of new and unending eras of celestial joy and infernal agony, the drama of earthly history will come to an end."

III

Anyone who knows the history of our Western world realizes that this story exercised an unparalleled influence on the mind and the life of Europe and America. It was by these great themes—the creation, the fall of man, the incarnation of the divine Redeemer, the atonement made on Calvary, and the world-judgment presently to begin—that the art, the literature, and the music of many centuries were inspired. These are the convictions that underlie the poetry of Dante and Milton, the paintings of the medieval artists, and the music of Handel and Bach. Furthermore this was the framework on which the ethical teaching of the Christian world was hung. In numberless homes this strange story was told and retold and its implications were made the major incentives toward a life of virtue. Robert Burns thus describes family worship in a Scotch home one hundred and fifty years ago.

> Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme—
> How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed,
> How He who bore in heaven the second name
> Had not on earth whereon to lay His head.[8]

Those four lines give the clue to centuries of Chris-

[8] From "The Cotter's Saturday Night."

tian history. They state the theme of an entire civilization.

But, fortunately or unfortunately, the situation has now changed and changed profoundly. The epic which went unchallenged for centuries and which became a source of inspiration for the entire Western world, has now lost—as far as millions of reflective individuals are concerned—its ancient authority. Many of us now believe that its statements belong to the realm of poetry rather than to that of historic fact. For what are the conclusions to which the studies of the past three centuries have forced us? Conclusions which contradict at a hundred points both the implications and the express statements of the ancient epic.

We now know, to begin with, that this Earth is not the center of the universe. Rather it is one of the smaller and less impressive of the uncounted millions of stars that spiral forever through Space. Furthermore we have discovered—and to a trained and unprejudiced mind the evidence is conclusive—that our race had an origin and an early history entirely different from those suggested in the Book of Genesis and accepted as historically accurate by the authors of the ancient epic. The end of the world? Long ago

thoughtful people became skeptical about it. They realize that a universe which has held itself in order for many millions of years, and which follows with almost incredible precision certain well-defined procedures, will probably not change its habits suddenly and dramatically. Thus the ancient epic, satisfying and convincing for centuries, has now lost both its authority and its appeal. For an ever-increasing group of educated people it retains only a historic interest.

This situation lays an obvious responsibility on the Christian leaders of our time. They must devise a new epic which will take the place of the old. The thousands of isolated facts disclosed by recent scientific investigation must be fitted together in a new synthesis which will give the thoughtful men and women of our time a reasonable and a convincing interpretation of the life-process. Until this new epic is completed and substituted for the fast-fading epic of the past, Christianity will labor under a heavy handicap. It may be able to discuss minor problems and answer small inquiries. But it will not be able to give men what they insistently demand—a theory of the purpose of life-as-a-whole, and a convincing

account of the way in which that purpose has been fulfilling itself in the historic process.

As the leaders of modern Christianity undertake this task they would do well to recall this important fact. The ancient epic was not the product of any individual or even of any generation. It represented the combined effort of numberless individuals and many generations. Paul began building the story some twenty years after Jesus' death. He appropriated ideas and theories which still earlier thinkers had devised, and ingeniously incorporated them in his new synthesis. The author of the Fourth Gospel, writing some years after Paul, advanced other ideas which proved of immense importance. The early Catholic theologians took all these ideas, added fresh convictions of their own, and began to shape the great story of sin and salvation. That story reached its first major expression in the teaching of Augustine, but throughout the Middle Ages men continued to revise and expand it. Thomas Aquinas completed the next great formulation, and John Calvin the next. In the centuries following the Reformation the statements of Aquinas and Calvin were elaborated at some points and quietly over-

looked at others, and the current Catholic and Protestant versions of the traditional epic thus came into being. It is important to recall this long development as the new epic is perfected and gradually supplants the old. The new story will not be the product of any individual or even of any century. We see its beginnings to-day, but there is every likelihood that for generations to come the ideas now taking shape will be subjected to a continuous process of analysis, correction, restatement, and elaboration. What, now, is the present form of the new Christian epic?

IV

"At the beginning of things there existed a vast Mind-and-Power-and-Goodness which we call God. For reasons we can neither understand nor explain God undertook a strange venture—the creation of human personalities that would grow into perfection. This growth-process involved millions of years and innumerable temporary defeats. It also involved giving human beings partial control over their own actions, a power which has often been used in disastrous fashion. Yet God decided to make the venture, and then with a strange slowness and unimpressiveness the world-drama began. First God provided

a place in which human personalities could emerge and, thanks to struggle with the environment and contact with each other, gain their growth. How God created the inorganic world, and through what stages it passed in its early history, we do not know. Scientific study has disclosed many single facts and established many probabilities, but the entire story is as yet anything but clear. Our distant descendants may, and we are confident will, fill many of the present gaps in the narrative.

"When the surface of the cooling Earth was finally ready for the emergence of organic life the first germs of life appeared. Where they came from we do not know. How the apparently impassable gulf between living and nonliving forms was bridged we cannot explain. Whether there was a second creative act on the part of God, or whether in the normal process of evolution the combination of certain chemical elements led to the emergence of something alive, we cannot say. But somehow and somewhere life appeared, and once it was established it developed in a hundred different directions. First appeared the invertebrates, then the fish, then the reptiles, then the birds, then the mammals. At last, somewhere in the animal realm, there emerged a

creature that had the capacity to surpass any of his predecessors. This creature was the precursor of man. The Earth on which men were to live and grow was ready, and now the physical mechanism through which human personalities were to function—a highly developed animal body—was also ready. The next act in the drama could begin.

"As yet we have no idea when or where the first creature we might fairly term a man appeared. We certainly have no idea how that intangible, invisible reality we call a human personality entered, and assumed at least partial control of, the body-brain mechanism that had been so slowly and patiently evolved. As a matter of fact we can neither understand nor explain the process when it takes place as each child is born to-day, and as a new human self gradually gains dominion over a body and a brain produced by a blind process of growth. All we can say is that these events do take place, and take place all about us. Thousands of years ago an analogous event marked the beginning of human as distinguished from subhuman evolution.

"In the long centuries since that day uncounted billions of human personalities have appeared on the Earth and begun the long process of growth. In

some instances the body-brain mechanism provided for them has proved tragically defective. In these cases no normal development of the personality has been possible. This is the predicament of children born with a defective brain or a deformed body. But fortunately tragedies of this type are relatively few. In the great majority of cases the physical mechanism provided by the biological process proves fairly adequate. The personality functioning through this mechanism can live and work, struggle and achieve, and through this effort gradually lift itself to higher levels of intelligence, kindness, and creative power. This evolution of the self continues—under normal circumstances—for sixty, seventy, or even more than eighty years. Meantime the body-brain mechanism constantly repairs and renews itself, gradually changing from the form seen in childhood to that seen in old age. Then comes the complete breakdown of the mechanism, the event we call death. Is death anything to fear? Certainly not! If God spent millions of years preparing a world in which personalities could emerge and develop, and then additional millions of years perfecting a physical mechanism through which those personalities could achieve the growth He purposed for them, it seems wholly un-

likely that something as insignificant as an accident or the wearing-out of the body could negate the entire venture and bring to a sudden and essentially futile end a process which up to that instant had been rational, consistent, and surprisingly effective. Granted that we cannot demonstrate immortality, or describe even in the most general terms the nature of the next phase of our evolution. We are convinced that human selves came from God, that they partake of His immortal quality, and that after they have begun their development within the body-brain mechanism familiar here, they will continue that development within another mechanism somewhere else. Having begun the venture of creating personalities that will grow into perfection, God certainly will not terminate that venture until all the human selves He has brought into existence attain, sometime and somewhere, the spiritual completeness He purposed for them."

> Comrade to comrade we shall talk at last
> When, unencumbered by this temporal clay,
> We watch the archangelic whirlwinds play
> Above the worlds at once above the Vast.
> And we shall talk, knowing as we are known
> In the bright, placid mirror of God's look,

Never bewildered, nevermore alone,
For He will give us more than He ever took;
And all His loveliest mysteries will be shown
As open legends in an ancient book.[4]

V

Where does Jesus fit into this new story of life and history? Can we call this a Christian epic, or is it merely a secular speculation about the world-process? We must confess frankly that the old picture of Jesus' life and work cannot be placed within this new framework. In the light of modern research we cannot think of Jesus as a preëxistent divine being who, by the special act of God and in order to rescue a race doomed by Adam's sin, descended from heaven and became incarnate in a child who was miraculously born. We certainly cannot believe that Jesus, by voluntary agonies on Calvary, made it possible for God to forget His ancient wrath and rescue a fraction of the human race from eternal torment. These theories, accepted by and convincing to medieval minds, contradict at a hundred points not only our modern knowledge but also our modern ethical intuitions.

How do we interpret Jesus? How do we fit him

[4] Marguerite Wilkinson in *The Third Book of Modern Verse*, p. 39.

into the new Christian epic? As we look back across the centuries and study the millions of human beings that have appeared on the Earth we find one man noticeably different from the rest. He gave the world new ideas which have, in the actual test of life, proved of inestimable benefit and significance. He lived in a new way, a way which has proved to be the most satisfying humanity knows. It is around Jesus' beliefs that the better institutions of our world have gradually been built. It is along Jesus' way of life that more and more people have walked, each finding it a road that leads to courage, power, and happiness. In a world whose watchword is growth, and surrounded by fellow men who are trying to grow, Jesus stands supreme.. He has shown us what a human personality can be. He has wakened in us the desire to live at our best. He has assured us that around all these struggling human lives brood the unfaltering love and the unfailing help of God. Without Jesus ours would be a dark world, filled with fear, selfishness and despair. With Jesus it is a world that reveals more and more hope, more and more courage, more and more spiritual achievement. Jesus has proved to be what a thinker of long ago ventured to call him, "the life and the light of men."

CHAPTER V

OUR GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

I

THE Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has recently acquired a remarkable collection of ancient Egyptian scarabs. They were originally the property of Lord Carnarvon, the eminent Egyptologist, but after his death they were purchased by Mr. Edward S. Harkness and brought to this country. The ancient Egyptians wore these scarabs as charms, and on the larger ones we can still read the prayers addressed to the deities of long ago. According to popular belief a god thus addressed was under obligation to help the wearer of the scarab. Here are some of the inscriptions which scholars have deciphered:

> May Isis and Rê be behind thee!
> Mût is my life and my protection.
> Fear not: Khousu sees.
> May Horus protect thee!

Perhaps the handsomest scarab in the collection dates from the eighth century before Christ. It is about an inch long, half an inch wide, and a quarter of an inch thick. It is made of dark blue pottery, the top is exquisitely carved with symbolic figures, and on the bottom is an inscription which suggests some of the phrases in our own Book of Psalms. "Fear not! Upwawet (the jackal-god) is beside thee." Think, now, of the Egyptian who, some twenty-eight centuries ago, carved those words. Were his religious beliefs right or wrong?

Our first impulse is to say that they were wrong, entirely wrong. We are convinced that there is no such being as Upwawet, and that there never has been. Like Zeus and Jupiter, Bel and Moloch, he belongs in the list of imaginary deities. When we read the prayer addressed to him we are convinced that the man who carved those eager words was the victim of a delusion. There was, in reality, no jackal-god who would protect his friend.

Many people of our time, following this familiar line of thought, soon find themselves facing a difficult question. If the Egyptians were thus mistaken about Upwawet, may not the Hebrews have been equally mistaken about Jehovah? May we not be

mistaken about God? Is there any more reason for believing in the existence of the last divinity in the series than there was for believing in the existence of the first? Many college students, thus noting the successive stages in the evolution of religious thought, and realizing that the gods of one age are quietly but ruthlessly discredited by the growing knowledge of subsequent ages, reach the conclusion that a time will come—and perhaps come in the not-distant future—when the notion of deities will be completely abandoned by intelligent people. In that day men will, these students assert, abandon all thought of supernatural powers and regard the familiar phrases in Christian prayers as quaint and as unconvincing as we count the phrases on an ancient scarab. Is this the right interpretation of the obvious changes in religious beliefs? Is our present trust in a kindly God merely the last stage in a slowly fading superstition?

II

The way out of this dilemma is fairly plain. Suppose instead of saying that the scarab-maker was entirely wrong in his religious beliefs, we take the position that he was only partially wrong. Suppose we say that he was right in his theory that some sort

of an Unseen Power is here in the universe, but wrong when he gave that Unseen Power the name and the symbol he did. As a matter of fact many of the beliefs of the ancient world prove, on careful examination, to contain some such mixture of truth and error. Consider the old notions about the Sun. Men realized that it gave light and heat, but they also said it was dragged daily across the sky by a supernatural being. The first belief was right, the second wrong. What if the religious beliefs of antiquity contained some such mixture of truth and error? What if the Egyptian scarab-maker was right when he said there is a Friendly Someone here with us, but wrong when he ventured to give further details?

When one follows this theory the successive religious beliefs of the generations gain a new interest and significance. They prove to resemble the changing and improving beliefs men have held on every other subject. They disclose themselves as successive stages in the long march toward ultimate religious truth. The numberless divinities in which men have believed, ranging all the way from Upwawet to "the Power not ourselves making for righteousness,"

appear as something better than the consecutive delusions of credulous minds. They prove to be sequential stages in our knowledge of and acquaintance with the Unseen Someone behind life. The changing religious rituals of mankind, beginning with the cruel and stupid rites of primitive men, and ending with the quiet prayer of self-dedication made by Jesus in Gethsemane, become something more impressive than repetitious blunders. They reveal themselves as advances in our understanding of God's purpose and desire. When we find that primitive men made the mistake of believing that the Sun was dragged daily across the sky, and that later generations corrected that mistake only to make another in saying that the Sun revolved around a stationary Earth, we do not say that all notions about the Sun—modern as well as ancient—are mistaken, and that the study of the Sun is a waste of time. Rather we realize that the generations have moved slowly but steadily toward an accurate understanding of something indubitably real and thoroughly worth investigating. Why do we not take this same attitude when we survey the long record of changing and ever-improving religious beliefs?

When, holding this theory, we turn from the past to the future, a great hope quickens within the heart. We realize that the process of discovering truth about God still goes on, and we begin to hope that during our own lifetime new and immensely significant insights may be achieved. Here, of course, lies the fascination of a career in religious research. If a minister to-day were called merely to mumble old words and rethresh musty theological straw, then young men with keen minds and daring hearts would have every right to view his career with scorn. But when they realize that a religious leader has the same opportunity a scientist has—the chance to push ahead and explore some vast and as yet uncharted sea of truth—then they understand why the minister's career offers one of the greatest opportunities in the modern world. What will eventually be discovered about God no one can say. But we do know that the march toward religious certainty, a march that began with man's first speculations about the Power behind life, and that was centuries old when the scarab-maker carved his words about Upwawet, still goes on. Perhaps our generation is destined to witness the next great illumination of the eager human spirit. Who can say?

III

Those of us who interpret religious history in this way believe that the men of yesterday passed three great milestones in this march toward ultimate truth. The first was passed when men became convinced, early in our racial evolution, that there is an Unseen Someone here with us. Naturally primitive ideas about this Unseen Being were crude and unimpressive. So were early speculations about the size and shape of the Earth, and early notions about the forces of the natural world. Primitive men made the mistake of thinking that there were innumerable unseen beings, that they were localized and limited in power, and that many of them were hostile to humanity. But the important fact is not that primitive men made mistakes. The important fact is that men realized they were not entirely alone in this apparently empty world. In the course of time their false notions about the One who is here with us were corrected, and the core of truth at the heart of their belief was revealed.

How did the idea of a god—or gods—originally arise? What wakened this momentous conviction in human minds? John Fiske quotes the words uttered by an African savage who one day unbosomed him-

self to an explorer. "Twelve years ago I went to feed my flocks. I sat down upon a rock and began to ask myself sorrowful questions, sorrowful because I could not answer them. Who has touched the stars with his hands? On what pillars does the earth rest? The waters flow without ceasing from morning until night, and then from night until morning. Who makes them flow, and where do they stop? The clouds come and go, and burst into water over the earth. Who sends them? And how does the corn sprout? Yesterday there was not a blade in my field. But to-day I return and find many. Who gave the earth the wisdom and the power to produce them?" [1] The source of primitive man's belief in an Unseen Power is clear. Our distant forbears were trying to explain the strange universe in which they found themselves. They explained it by inferring an Unseen Being, or Beings, responsible for the situations that confronted them. From an obvious effect they argued back to a presumable cause.

Has the wisdom of later centuries overthrown this type of argument? Suppose we confess frankly that we can no longer argue back from single and isolated

[1] From John Fiske, *The Idea of God.*

events such as a flowing stream or a sprouting seed to deities who are directly and immediately responsible for them. We now realize, thanks to the advances of science, that such events are integral parts of a vast and mechanical world-process. These events can be—to a certain extent, at least—understood and controlled, and anyone who attempts to argue back from each of them to a near-by divinity will now win few converts. Yet for all our understanding of single processes and isolated events the universe as whole continues to be a source of profound wonder. The life-process, studied in its entirety, wakens in every thoughtful mind a sense of awe. Listen to the confession of one of our modern astronomers. "To an astronomer the most remarkable thing about the stellar universe is not its vast extent in Space, nor the long periods of astronomical time, nor the violence of the forces that operate within the stars. The thing that strikes the astronomer with awe is the perfect orderliness of celestial phenomena. From the tiny satellites of the solar system to the vast galaxy of our stars and the other immense galaxies beyond, there is no sign of chaos. There is nothing haphazard, nothing capricious. The orderli-

ness of the universe is the supreme discovery of science." [2]

Most of us, studying that order through a microscope or a telescope, find the sense of wonder stirring within us. Then when we realize that our universe was not hammered into quick and permanent order as a box is shaped by a carpenter, but that it literally grew into order over an inconceivably vast period of time, and that it now holds itself in order by methods we can detect but not explain, our sense of wonder deepens. By no stretch of the imagination can we believe that such a universe called itself into being, or emerged as the end-result of an infinite succession of coincidences. Some Directive Intelligence must be operating here. Some Unseen Power must surround these millions of units that are swept into such an impressive whole. This Power and Intelligence we call God. To some of us belief in His reality is not attained by blind faith. That belief rests on reasonable deductions, deductions drawn from the nature of the universe within which we find ourselves.

IV

The second milestone in religious history was

[2] F. R. Moulton in *The Nature of the World and of Man*, p. 30.

passed when men realized that this Unseen Power is on the side of right. Granted that many people, in the present as well as in the past, have misunderstood and misinterpreted this belief, and have tried to make God the ally of their pet schemes and the enemy of their private aversions. The important fact is not that this great truth of the righteous character of the Power-behind-life has been perverted. The important fact is that for centuries men have realized that the causes they count just and noble have the backing of the God at the heart of things.

This insight was first gained, as most of us realize, by a small group of men living in Palestine some eight centuries before Christ. We call these men the Hebrew prophets, and their conviction about the moral character of God not only transformed contemporary religion but also became the basis of the finer religious beliefs of the modern world. You and I honor the men who first sensed the fact that the Earth is round, and who insisted that ships could sail westward from Spain without falling off the edge of a flat world. When will we realize that equal honor is due the men who first understood that the Unseen God favors right rather than wrong, and demands from each of us justice, honesty, and kindness?

> What doth the Lord thy God require of thee
> But to do justly, to love mercy,
> And to walk humbly with thy God? [2]

When those words were uttered humanity rounded a corner, and a new period in religious evolution began.

Can men to-day accept this conviction of the ancient prophets? Can we believe there is a Power-not-ourselves in this world, and then go on to say it is a Power making for righteousness? This is the point at which many of our contemporaries have serious doubts. Their scientific knowledge convinces them that our universe is an orderly place, and they realize that this element of order implies a Directive Intelligence. But beyond this point many of them find it hard to go. They feel that although there is a God, no one knows what He is like, and that the attempt to make Him the supporter and sustainer of human moral judgments is little more than theological wish-thinking. Is there any convincing answer to these doubts?

The only answer is an appeal to the nature of the universe within which we find ourselves. The more we study life and history the more clearly we see that

[2] Micah vi. 8.

our world is not a world which is indifferent to right and wrong, or a world that permits truth to triumph to-day and falsehood to survive to-morrow. Just as there are essential uniformities we call laws of Nature which pervade the physical universe so there are essential principles we call moral laws which repeatedly reveal themselves in the affairs of men. The world-process discloses a decided preference for truth over falsehood, for justice over oppression, for kindness over cruelty, and for beauty over ugliness. In the long run the former rather than the latter survive. James Anthony Froude, writing after a lifetime spent in the study of history, stated the facts impressively. "History is a voice forever sounding across the centuries the laws of right and wrong. Opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall. But the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity. For every false word or unrighteous act, for every deed of cruelty and oppression, lust or vanity, the price must be paid at last. Not always by the chief offender, to be sure, but by someone. Justice and truth alone endure. Injustice and falsehood may be long-lived, but doomsday comes to them at last. One lesson and only one history may be said to repeat with distinctness—our world is somehow built on

moral foundations. In the long run it is well with the good, and ill with the wicked." What does such a world, with its decisive moral preferences, tell us about the One who called it into being? Must He not have an understanding of right and a desire that right survive? Granted there are many things about God which we do not know and which we may never find out. Some of us are sure that a human mind located ultimate truth when centuries ago it attributed to God the solemn words:

> I hate, I despise your feasts,
> I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
> But let justice roll down as the waters,
> And righteousness as a mighty stream.[4]

Here again our conviction rests on something more solid than blind faith or personal desire. It rests on a logical inference drawn from the nature of the universe in which we live, and the nature of the life-process which has been going on—and going on in a consistent way—for centuries.

V

The third religious advance of the ancient world was made when Jesus said that God loves every

[4] Amos v. 21-24.

human being—loves him irrespective of his race, his creed, his social position, and even his previous moral record. Simply because the man is a human being God surrounds him with an unfailing love and an unfaltering eagerness to help. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For *everyone* that asketh receiveth, *everyone* that seeketh findeth, to *everyone* that knocketh it shall be opened." [5] When those words were uttered humanity turned still another corner in its quest for the truth about God. Men began to stop thinking of God as a Veiled Being, or even as a Veiled Being who favored righteousness. They began to think of Him as the Kind Father of every human soul. They began to say exultantly, "God is love."

On what argument did Jesus base this conclusion about God's character? To say that Jesus merely affirmed the love of God but had no reason for his belief is to overlook the fact that all our affirmations rest ultimately on a series of convictions linked into an argument. Unfortunately the Gospels have preserved for us only one short passage in which the workings of Jesus' mind on this point are revealed.

[5] Matthew vii. 7, 8.

"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven!" [6] The steps in Jesus' argument are fairly clear. He seems to say this: "We find that human parents, in spite of all their limitations, reveal unfailing love and tenderness. If these qualities are in human hearts must they not be, to an even greater extent, in the One from whom all of us came? If human parents can love so deeply and devotedly must God not love even more?" From a quality inherent in an effect Jesus argues back to a quality inherent in a cause.

Can intelligent people to-day accept Jesus' theory of a divine love? The easy way to deal with that question is to assume that Jesus was miraculously equipped to discover the truth and divinely authorized to reveal it. Therefore, so runs the familiar argument, we should accept Jesus' authority and believe what Jesus says. The difficulty is that thousands of reflective individuals are no longer able to take this familiar short-cut to religious certainty. Their study of the facts relating to Jesus' life makes it impossible for them to accept the orthodox interpretation of his nature, and their study of actual

[6] Matthew vii. 11.

human situations makes them wonder whether he was right in saying God loves human beings. When there are so many tragedies can Jesus' belief about a divine solicitude be true? One modern writer states his conclusions with unmistakable clearness. "Jesus' doctrine of the fatherhood of God," he says, "was not so much a revelation as a guess, and a guess that was wrong." [7]

Some of us, facing these modern doubts, fall back frankly on Jesus' own argument. When we find love in human hearts have we not the right to infer that love is found in the heart of God too? When we discover that human beings care so much about each other, and are ready to show toward each other such unfailing loyalty and unfaltering devotion, can we not conclude that these noble qualities are present in God as well? It would be strange if we possessed virtues which He lacks. Granted there are many situations which it is difficult to explain on the theory that a Fatherly God is in control, even in partial control, of the life-process. It is even more difficult to explain life and human experience on the theory that God is cruel or even indifferent. If, basing our conclusion on the amount of pain in life, we insist that

[7] Robert Keable, *The Great Galilean*, p. 50.

God takes no interest in human affairs we are left with an insoluble problem on our hands. If God is indifferent how do we explain the love which discloses itself all about us? Could it have emerged in a heartless world called into existence by a heartless Creator? Each interpretation of life—one picturing a kindly and the other an indifferent God—has its difficulties. Many of us, studying both interpretations, have reached the conclusion that the former is more convincing than the latter. We accept Jesus' theory, and we trust ourselves and those we love to a God who is, we believe, dominated by kindness.

VI

If these are the advances in religious knowledge made by the men of the past, what are the advances recorded in our own time? One certainly is this. We now understand, as the men of long ago never did, how God's help comes to men. In antiquity religious leaders thought God gave help by changing situations in the external world. These sudden and beneficent changes they called miracles, and they filled the records of early religion with miracle stories. We read that plagues were suddenly arrested, that storms

were stilled, that food and water were provided in the desert, and that (according to one of the oldest legends in the Old Testament) the Sun stood still in the sky and thus lengthened the time for winning victory. One reason why it is so hard for people to-day to use the religious writings that have come down from the past is that these writings usually imply that God's help comes through startling occurrences in the external world, while we have come to believe that the divine help comes in an entirely different way.

Where does a modern man look for God's help? You and I are confronted by a hard situation and instinctively we pray. The answer to our prayer comes in a change wrought within us—in a new idea emerging within the mind, a new courage rising within the heart. Our outward situation remains exactly what it was before. The same problems are to be solved, the same burdens are to be carried, the same temptations are to be mastered. But we ourselves are changed, and by changing us God enables us to manage the situation which previously was unmanageable. How greatly this new conception of God's help will modify the religious beliefs and prac-

tices of the future no one can say. But it has already turned our attention from the alleged miracles of the external world to the actual changes wrought within human minds and hearts. It has made us seek answers to prayer and evidences of divine help not in some startling redirection of the normal processes of Nature but in the quiet "restoring of the soul." It has completely undermined the criticism of Christianity based on the fact that many of the miracles recorded in the Bible never happened. To those who have moved ahead with our advancing knowledge of God and His ways of acting the disproof of miraculous incidents reported in ancient religious literature is an insignificant thing. We have learned to look for God in the world within, not in the world without. We have learned to hear Him not in earthquake, wind, and fire, but in a still, small voice.

Another religious advance recorded in recent times is this. We have now reached the conclusion that God has always been trying to obliterate the suffering and sorrow of the world, and that He is seeking to enlist us in this great struggle. This belief is, of course, entirely different from the belief which underlay much of the religious teaching of the past. Formerly men were urged to accept the tragedies

that befell them. They were told that the decrees of Providence were inscrutable, that God deliberately sent suffering in order to chasten those He loved, and that the duty of human beings was to take what God was pleased to send, bitter though the discipline might be. The effect of this teaching is apparent in the religious writings of yesterday. We find constant appeals for a proper attitude of resignation, numberless sermons which seek to prove that tragedy is a blessing in disguise, and many hymns calling for "a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by every foe."

To-day those ideas about God and His ways of working are fading rapidly. In their place we find the new conviction that God has always been trying to obliterate the sources of pain, and that He is calling us to help Him in the building of a new and happier world. No man with the modern point of view can share the notion that tornadoes, earthquakes, and cataclysms of Nature are "acts of God." To us they seem tragic coincidences, nothing more. As we try to protect ourselves against them, and as we seek to devise ways by which we may gain some warning of their approach, we feel we are working with rather than against the Friendly Someone at the

heart of life. No one who shares the new views can, as he faces the tragedy of an untimely death, repeat with conviction the familiar phrase, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God to *take* . . ." We believe that God is not the cause of such disasters, that they are as much of a tragedy to Him as they are to us, and that His effort is to help us out of our difficulties rather than plunge us deeper into them. We might sum up the new beliefs by saying that the men of the past were taught to accept a world of suffering on the theory that God had made it and that God knows what is best. We, on the contrary, struggle against a world of suffering and seek to change it, on the theory that God hates needless pain as much as we do, and that He calls us to join Him in the creation of a friendlier and a happier world.

> Creation's Lord, we give Thee thanks
> That this our world is incomplete,
> That battle calls our marshalled ranks,
> That work awaits our hands and feet,
> That Thou hast not yet finished man,
> That we are in the making still—
> As friends who share the Maker's plan,
> As sons who know the Father's will.[8]

[8] William DeWitt Hyde.

Those words could not have been written in the pre-modern world. They are a proof that our beliefs about God still change and improve. They are a promise of still greater wisdom in the years ahead.

CHAPTER VI

IS GOD INTERESTED IN INDIVIDUALS?

I

ONE morning several summers ago three of us were wading down a salmon stream in Newfoundland. As we turned a bend in the river the guide pointed to a ball of brown feathers bobbing up and down in the swift water ahead. It was a young sparrow that had either fallen from its nest or tumbled into the stream as it tried to fly across. The little bird was making a brave fight for life. Even at our distance we could see its wings beating frantically and its head turning in desperation from one side to another. But the current and the waves were more than a match for the fledgling, and just as we waded near the sparrow it rolled over dead. The guide lifted the forlorn little body onto a boulder projecting from the stream, and we waited for a few moments to see if the bird showed any sign of life. The sparrow's head fell back grotesquely on the stone, and its legs pointed skyward at an insane

angle. As I stared at those dripping feathers a verse from the Gospels flashed into my mind. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father." [1] Jesus believed that God's interest and solicitude reach down to include even the lowest and the weakest forms of life. According to Jesus even the sparrow that falls from its nest and drowns in a stream is watched, loved, and pitied by the Maker of heaven and Earth. Can we accept such a theory to-day? Can we even go so far as to say that God is concerned with individual human beings?

We might well note at the outset of our discussion that faith in the divine solicitude, a solicitude that involves the care of the most insignificant individual, was one of the distinguishing elements in the Christianity of the past. Our predecessors did more than hold before the world fine ideals of brotherhood and service. They also insisted that God's interest, God's love, and God's care surround each one of us, no matter how small or how sinful we may be. God can be trusted, these Christians believed, to supply our daily needs. He can be relied upon to deliver us from danger. When we fall into sin He Himself

[1] Matthew x. 29.

comes to save us. This was the picture of the divine providence which the Christianity of the past painted. It grew out of Jesus' basic teaching that God is concerned, and concerned immensely, with every human soul. It expressed itself in such hymns as "There were ninety and nine," "He leadeth me," and "God will take care of you." Without question this was one of the most significant elements in the historic gospel, one of the strongest appeals the Christianity of yesterday possessed. Can we still retain this portion of the old faith, or must we—confronted by the revelations of growing experience and advancing knowledge—either modify the ancient teaching or abandon it entirely?

Here, as most ministers will testify, is one of the most baffling problems modern Christianity faces. Most thoughtful people admit there is a God at work in our universe. Most people grant He is good and kind. But whether His goodness and His kindness mean that He watches over individuals, as Jesus said, is another question. To believe that God is concerned with each one of us seems—these people say—to carry faith too far, and to let our hope and our desire over-rule the judgment of our reason. How

can God be individually interested in and personally concerned over each of the millions of human beings on the earth to-day?

As we try to answer these questions and meet these doubts it is obvious we cannot follow the method used by our grandparents. The break between their point of view and ours has been sudden and complete. Our predecessors, faced by questions about the extent and the nature of divine providence, referred the skeptic to an external authority which, according to the belief of the day, had supernatural guarantees. Sometimes the reference was to the Church. "Here," said our predecessors, "is a doctrine which has been taught for centuries. Behind it is the authority of the divinely established Church. It is inconceivable that God would permit His Church to go astray on such an important matter, and stay astray for such a long time. Therefore this doctrine must be true. Doubters should accept it." Sometimes the appeal was to the Bible, especially to the words of Jesus himself. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you?" "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." [2] How often those familiar

[2] Matthew vi. 30; x. 30.

words were quoted as a final and unanswerable proof of God's interest in and care for individuals! A century ago sermons on this subject stopped at this point. When the teaching of the Church had been explained, or when the words of Jesus had been cited, it was felt there was no need for further argument. The evidence was in, and the case was settled.

The situation to-day is, as most of us realize, entirely different. There are thousands of thoughtful people who for one reason or another cannot accept the ancient authorities. To try to relieve their difficulty by referring to orthodox doctrines or quoting proof-texts is to show a complete ignorance of their problem. Can we give these modern skeptics any reason for believing that God is interested in individuals, or must we confess that this element in the historic Christian belief rests solely on divine revelation?

II

There are some of us who base our faith in God's providence on three fairly obvious facts. To begin with, human personalities are—as far as we can

judge—the most valuable things in our universe. If God cares about anything, it seems reasonable to assume that He cares most about the things which are most precious.

Why do we say that human personalities have a unique and a supreme value? Because they have greater capacities, greater possibilities, than anything else we know. They have the power to think, to plan, to create, and to develop, and they possess it to an unparalleled extent. It is with reference to this power that we evaluate the millions of objects, inanimate or animate, which we find about us. Here, for example, are a pebble and an acorn. Which is more valuable? The pebble is harder, more durable, and more impervious to injury. Yet the pebble can never be anything but a pebble, whereas the acorn has within itself an immense possibility—the possibility of growing into an oak tree. Therefore we say the acorn is more valuable than the pebble. Here are a puppy and a little child. Which is more precious? In many ways the puppy is more impressive. The puppy can walk, find its own food, and even defend itself against enemies. The baby can, as yet, do none of these things. Yet we all agree that the baby is

more valuable than the puppy. Why? Because the baby has capacities and possibilities which a dog knows nothing about.

> You may be Christ or Shakespere, little child,
> A saviour or a sun to our lost world!
> There is no babe born but may carry furled
> Strength to make bloom the earth's disastrous wild.[8]

The possibilities thus wrapped up within a human life are, of course, not limited to those that immediately disclose themselves. In numberless cases the full achievement and significance of an individual appear only after centuries pass. Jesus is a familiar example. On Calvary he seemed a complete and a pitiful failure. To-day we realize he has exerted and still exerts an incomparable influence for good. The same principle holds true in the case of less important figures. Individuals who at the moment seem insignificant often succeed in releasing noble forces which slowly transform the lives of other men, and call into being institutions which endure long after the individuals themselves have passed away. Judged on this scale what can compare in value with human beings, even those who seem small and unimportant? Each one has powers and capacities, abil-

[8] James Oppenheim.

ities and possibilities, which set him apart from all the objects of the inanimate world and all other living creatures. The Nile seems greater, more permanent, and far more beneficial to Africa than the brown-skinned man who walks its banks. But when all is said, the Nile does not know what it is doing, and it lacks the ability to change its action in accordance with a preconceived plan. The giant redwoods of California live longer than any human being, and make even the largest and strongest man seem small in comparison. But the giant redwoods lack the capacity for intelligent and creative effort which even a little child possesses. Centuries ago Jesus watched a group of boys and girls in a Galilean village and then said to his followers, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones! Their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." The belief in guardian angels faded long ago. But Jesus' perception of the unique value of human beings and their supreme importance in the sight of God was an insight that is profoundly and permanently true. In the final analysis our faith in God's interest in and concern for individuals does not rest on blind faith. It rests on an insight which we share with Jesus—the realization that human

beings have a unique value, and that if God cares about anything He must care, and care supremely, about them.

III

Or consider another fact which is closely related to the one we were just discussing. Life demands that all of us show kindness and helpfulness to every human being we meet. Life makes this demand because each individual possesses a supreme value. Whether the people about us seem important or not, we must show them respect and consideration. In case of need we must do everything we can to help them. Here is a belief which has become basic in our civilization. In accordance with it we train our children to show kindness toward everyone. We tell them that when a human life is at stake nothing else matters, and that the saving of a human life—particularly the life of a child—is an achievement of incomparable value. This tradition and this teaching do not rest on custom, emotion, or group loyalty. They rest on reason and intelligence, and anyone who gives the subject even a few moments of thought can detect those hidden and rocklike foundations.

Some years ago a five-year-old boy in a village in

Iowa fell desperately ill. The local doctor realized that the child's only chance for life was an immediate operation in a hospital. Unfortunately the nearest hospital was twelve miles away and a blizzard was raging. The snow was already five feet deep on the road across the prairie. Must that boy die before morning, or would the men of the village rally to save him? The doctor sent an emergency telephone message to each of the forty men in the vicinity. Though it was nine o'clock at night, and though the storm was at its worst, every man in the community took a snow shovel and hurried to the boy's home. For six hours those men fought with the deepening drifts, while behind them an improvised ambulance crept nearer and nearer the hospital. At three in the morning the journey was finished, the operation was performed, and the child's life saved. The story was published in an Iowa newspaper, and copied from one end of the world to the other.[4] Everyone who reads it honors the men who did their best to help that little boy. If it is a duty for us to care for each other and help each other, is it not a duty for God to do the same thing? Is the rule kindness for human beings, and cool indifference for God?

[4] See the *New York Times,* November 21, 1926.

Many people, coming to this point in their thinking, are beset by a familiar difficulty. They grant that human beings have an unique value, and that God ought to have a personal interest in each of them. They admit that the rule of kindness, growing out of this fact of the unique value of people, presumably applies to God as well as to men. But the mathematical difficulties of such a theory of divine providence seem insuperable. How can God be interested in individuals when there are so many of them to be interested in? Nearly two billion of us on the earth to-day, three entirely new generations each century, and the centuries reaching back no one knows how far. To compute the number of human beings that have emerged in the evolutionary process is utterly impossible. To say that God is concerned with each one seems ridiculous. How can God distinguish between them? How can He attend individually to each of these billions of lives?

The usual escape from this dilemma is to say that God is concerned with the human race as a whole, but not with the individuals who make up the race. The analogy frequently suggested is that of a general and his army. The general's interest is, of course, the army as a whole. He has no personal acquaint-

ance with the thousands of private soldiers. He realizes that the empty places a battle leaves in his ranks will soon be filled by new fighters, and that his task is to bring the army—ever changing and ever renewing itself—to the distant capital he is aiming to capture. In some such way, many people now tell us, God is concerned with the human race as a whole, and is striving to lead it forward to victory. What happens in the process to the successive soldiers who march, fight, and die the Divine Leader never knows. He certainly cannot be pictured as hurrying from one point in the line to the next, trying to keep his men from harm. His objective is to win the campaign, not to consider the fate of individuals. Is there any answer to this argument, or do the mathematical difficulties of Jesus' theory make that theory untenable?

The answer to the mathematical objection is simpler than many people realize. Consider your own experience in becoming acquainted with people and gaining an interest in their affairs. As the years have passed the range of your friendship has increased enormously, and your ability to keep individuals distinct in your thought has enlarged beyond all expectation. When you were a child there were perhaps

a dozen people in your tiny world. Father and mother, brother and sister, a few of the visitors in your home—beyond that little group your immature mind could not go. By the time you reached the twenties there were several hundred individuals whom you knew well and in each of whom you took a genuine interest. As you neared middle life you found the circle of your acquaintance widening steadily. There were perhaps a thousand men, women, and children whose affairs were at least partially familiar to you. These people never "ran together" in your thoughts. Each one was separate and distinct. As you reach the later years of life, particularly if your work brings you in contact with many different people, still more individuals will be added to the list of your friends. A time may come when it would be impossible for you to enumerate all the men and women whom you know and in whom you are interested. If this is the capacity of a human mind, a mind that has developed for only seventy or eighty years, what must be the capacity of an Infinite Mind? May it not be possible for God to see, know, and love each one of us? Centuries ago a Hebrew poet, perplexed by this same problem, found his answer as he watched the stars, recalled

the greatness of the Mind that controls them, and then realized that such a God is mighty enough to know and love each human being.

Lift your eyes, look up!
Who made all these stars?
He marshalls them in order,
Summoning each by name.
Why then do you complain:
"My fate the Eternal never notices!"
Do you not understand
That the Eternal is an Everlasting God,
The Maker of the world from end to end?
He never faints, never grows weary,
His insight is unsearchable.
Those who wait for Him renew their strength,
They put out wings like eagles,
They run and are never weary,
They walk and never faint.[5]

IV

There is still another reason why some of us believe God is interested in individuals. Our own experience points clearly in this direction. As we look back over our own life, and over the lives of those we have known well, what do we find? The conviction forces itself upon us that Someone wiser and

[5] Isaiah xl. 26-31 (Moffatt's Translation).

stronger than we are has had a hand in our affairs. Naturally this is a situation which discloses itself in the later rather than the earlier years. During the teens and twenties the pattern of our career is not revealed fully enough to disclose recurrent figures and sustained designs. Obviously the experiences that lead us to believe in God's interest and guidance are, in nearly every case, experiences of such an intimate and personal nature that it is hard to discuss them with other people. It proves impossible to acquaint our friends with the full significance of our insights, convictions, and ever-deepening assurances. Yet there the experiences are, scores of them. To us they seem as real and convincing as objects touched by our fingers, or arguments proving a theorem in geometry.

We find, for example, that at one period in our life certain opportunities came to us which gave us the exact preparation we needed for the utterly unexpected responsibilities of later years. As we study our life as a whole we conclude we were fitted in advance for work we were ultimately compelled to do. Even more striking were the disappointments which, at some later day of vision, disclosed themselves as blessings in disguise. Had we been able

to follow our own plans the results would have been, as we later realized, disastrous. The best things that happened to us were things that happened not only without our effort but directly against our desire. Is all this imagination, a neat defense-mechanism of the mind? Some of us can never think so. Rather, as we grow older, we become more and more certain that God led us in ways we did not understand to a place we did not see—a place which was His choice for us, and which is now our joy and our peace.

What about the cruel situations that seem to disprove divine solicitude and divine guidance? We must confess frankly that there are thousands of these negative instances. Sooner or later all of us encounter them, in the experience of other people if not in our own. We hear the sorry tale of defeats that are never justified, frustrations that bring no aftermath of wisdom and strength, and tragedies which—in spite of all our efforts at explanation—remain tragedies and nothing more. Do these darker phases of human experience not disprove the faith all of us would like to hold?

Face to face with this problem we shall do well to remember one fact. If, basing our conclusion on the evidences of pain and defeat, we announce that God

has nothing to do with human lives, then we face the problem of explaining the numberless guidances and deliverances which we find elsewhere. It will hardly do to attribute all these happy experiences to coincidence. They are too numerous, too significant, for that. Probably a wiser answer to the riddle is to say that God is working, in the face of obstacles and difficulties, to make full use of our powers and develop the priceless self hidden within us. Repeatedly we make blunders that frustrate His wise and kindly purpose. More than once other people draw us into the web of suffering and disaster they have woven. Meantime the relentless sequences of Nature continue, bringing after every seedtime an inevitable harvest. Strangest of all, we meet the factor of chance, a factor which brings unearned happiness to one person and undeserved disaster to his neighbor. It is in such a strange and complex world that God is at work, trying to develop and perfect human personalities and trying to use each of us to further the growth of other people. Is it any wonder that, amid such obstacles, God's desires and purposes are often frustrated? Is it surprising that He has to make second plans when the first go astray, that He needs time for the slow fulfillment of His ventures, and

that He must even provide another existence for us—an existence in which the character development cut short by death can be resumed and completed?

All this helps us understand how much is involved in God's interest and God's care. The divine guidance is, in many ways, similar to the guidance we human parents give our children. We do not take from our boys and girls their power of choice, nor do we protect them from the consequences of their own mistakes. We let the children make their own choices and manage, as best they can, the situations which ensue. Only by following this course can we develop in them wisdom, self-reliance, and sturdy endurance. Yet day by day, whether the children shape their careers wisely or foolishly, we surround the children with our interest, our love, our eagerness to help. When they encounter an emergency we offer them all the assistance love can bring. When disaster overtakes them we share their disappointment and their pain, and seek to lead them toward a better to-morrow. When they face a crucial decision we try to influence, but not over-rule, their choice. In all these ways we seek to guide them to the place and the work we feel are theirs.

This is a picture of God's guidance of human lives.

Different roads lie open before us, and we have the power to choose between them. Possibilities of suffering and disaster lurk on every side. Coincidence plays a strange rôle in the drama of life. But God is always beside us—seeking to protect us from harm, trying to lead us to the place He knows we ought to fill, and always hoping to develop our hidden powers and bring them to perfection. We can face the strange sequence of life, death, and life-beyond-death quietly and confidently. Underneath us are the Everlasting Arms, and around us is the Love that will not let us go.

CHAPTER VII

MODERN QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

I

We might well begin our discussion by pointing out this significant fact: Intelligent people to-day have questions about prayer and attitudes toward prayer which are noticeably different from the questions and attitudes current in premodern times. This change has been precipitated by a change in our beliefs about the world itself. Interpreting the world in a new way, we inevitably make a new interpretation of prayer. Picturing God and God's help in new ways, we inevitably draw a new picture of the process of seeking and securing divine assistance.

How radical the change in our views and habits has been you can judge by studying the records of ancient piety. In the Royal Gallery of Painting in Naples hangs a canvas showing what the people of the city did when the plague broke out in 1656. In the background of the picture stands the stricken city. In the foreground are the common people, pleading with the officials to pray for them. The officials in

turn are interceding with the monks from the local monastery, and the monks in turn are appealing to the three patron saints of Naples hovering in the sky. The saints are pleading with the Virgin Mary, she is interceding with Christ, and he is offering these accumulated and progressively effective petitions to God. What did the artist who painted that picture believe about the world? He was convinced it is filled with supernatural beings arranged in a hierarchy of importance and power. Those supernatural beings are able to change at any time and in any place the normal course of events. If one of them cannot manage the miracle himself he can turn to a fellow divinity of greater power and enlist his assistance. The conception of prayer growing out of this view of the world was a simple one. By prayer, according to the ancient belief, men tell the supernatural beings what situations ought to be changed, and then bring pressure on those supernatural beings to exert their miraculous power. That the saints and the Virgin, Christ and God, might intervene and wipe out the plague the pious Neapolitans never doubted.

Our modern view of the world is entirely different. The medieval belief in a hierarchy of divinities has faded, and the medieval belief in the possibility of

miracles has been supplanted by the conviction that such interruptions of the normal processes of Nature never take place. Natural processes may be studied, analyzed, and—to a certain extent—controlled. But they are never, so we believe, suddenly and arbitrarily overthrown by divinities, who interfere for the benefit of hard-pressed favorites. The conclusions and attitudes to which this current view leads were recently stated by an English essayist. "The faith of the educated person to-day is in man, in man as contrasted with God. In the attempt to deal with the problems of life human beings have always been offered this alternative—to put their trust in something other than and beyond themselves (such as inspiration, revelation, or acts of God), or to rely primarily on their own resources. Facing this choice to-day, the modern man makes an unhesitating decision. He chooses the second course. He puts his trust in man. In practice this means eugenics, psychoanalysis, scientific pedagogy, and applied ethnology." [1]

Where does prayer fit into such a scheme of things? The problem now forced on progressive Christianity

[1] Lawrence Hyde, "Can Science Control Life?" *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1930.

is far more serious than many religious leaders realize. With the passing of the old attitude toward the world, the old conception of prayer and the old habits of prayer have been suddenly swept away. What shall Christianity now do? Shall it revise its conception of prayer, shall it retain prayer merely as an effective device for auto-suggestion, or shall it abandon prayer entirely?

Some of us, studying these three possibilities, feel that the first represents the wisest course of action. To abandon prayer entirely, or to regard it merely as a psychological device by which a man bolsters up his self-confidence, would be to undermine fatally the religious (as contrasted with the ethical) half of Christianity. If God does nothing to help us, if He merely watches the course of events and never modifies it in any way, He has pitifully little significance for us. We can—and we soon shall—disregard Him entirely, confess that the century-old practice of prayer was essentially a delusion, and reduce religion to the narrow limits of a system of individual and social ethics. It would appear far wiser to revise our conception of prayer, bring it into accord with the new knowledge of the world and of human life which science has disclosed, and retain—as far as we can—

the old faith in a God who is not only interested but active. What does such a revision of the conception of prayer involve? Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to face frankly the three major doubts about prayer current in the modern world. As we study these doubts and try to meet the intellectual difficulties they raise, the outlines of the new theory about prayer will gradually become clear.

II

The first question now raised about prayer is this. Even if there is a God, and even if He is willing to help us, can He actually do anything? Science has shown that our world is a vast mechanism operated in accordance with well-defined and consistent principles, and shot through and through with rigid sequences we call laws of Nature. In such a world how can God interfere? Does not the theory of divine activity contradict the implications of scientific research and take us back to the medieval notion of an erratic world-process and an arbitrary God who occasionally indulges in miracles? This question, as most leaders of young people realize, is the one which perplexes great numbers of students, particularly boys and girls who have just begun to grasp the principle

of the uniform and relentless operation of natural laws. What is the answer to it?

Consider the telephone standing on your desk. It is a mechanism controlled by natural law. The transmitter is held in place by its own weight on a protruding hook. The downward tug of the transmitter pulls the hook toward the base of the instrument and thus breaks the connection between the telephone and the central exchange. A dial is built into the base of the instrument and kept motionless by a spring. The dial is held in such a position that no signal is flashed through to the distant office. Many ingenious mechanisms and many laws of electrical and mechanical action are combined in that extraordinary instrument and in the web of wires covering the city. If the instrument on your desk is never touched it will remain inert and useless till it finally falls to pieces. Its constitutent mechanisms and its carefully adjusted forces are waiting for one thing—a human being who knows how to use the telephone and who, by pitting one force against another, swings the successive mechanisms of the instrument and the central office into operation.

What happens when you use the telephone? You thrust forward your left hand, contract a certain set

of muscles in your arm, and lift the transmitter from the protruding hook. Instantly an electrical connection is made at the distant exchange. You then whirl the dial in a certain way, overcoming the resistance of the inner spring by the greater energy of your own fingers. This action sets in motion other mechanisms at the central office, a certain connection is made, a bell begins to ring in a distant home, and presently your conversation begins. The fact that you were surrounded by mechanisms throughout the entire episode proved no hindrance to you. The fact that certain laws of Nature controlled the operations of the telephone offered you no difficulty. You are a center of directive activity in that web of mechanisms and natural laws, and by working through the mechanisms and in accordance with the natural laws you readily and promptly carried out your purpose. What the power is by which human beings thus redirect the forces of Nature and make an intelligent and purposeful use of the mechanisms that surround us no one can say. But that every human being possesses this power no one can deny. The most obvious fact in our experience is that we are centers of creative and directive activity in a world crammed with mechanical contrivances and rigidly dominated

by natural laws. The mechanisms and the laws do not make us prisoners or leave us helpless. Rather they are tools in our hands, reliable and orderly means by which we carry out our purposes.

Suppose, now, that God has the same power we have. Suppose He too can work through the mechanisms and the laws of the universe, carrying out with their help and in accordance with their capacity His own desires. Then God is no more hindered by or imprisoned within the processes of life than we are. He, like each of us, fulfills His purposes by working through the agencies at hand. We human beings are not helpless, even in a world with mechanisms more numerous and laws more rigid than men suspected in the past. If we are not helpless why should we fancy that God is?

This is the point at which the new theory of prayer starts. It pictures a living, loving God who is a center of directive power in a law-abiding but essentially controllable world. It insists that God is active in that world, utilizing its mechanisms and its processes to carry out His wise and kindly plans. God is not an imaginary Being, the unreal projection of our eager human desire. Neither is He a deity who watches, pities, and finds Himself unable to inter-

vene. He is an objective though immaterial reality. He is also, as men discovered long ago, "a very present help in time of trouble."

III

The next question now raised about prayer is far more puzzling. If God helps us how does His help come? Does it take the form of a change in the external world, or a change in the life of the people about us, or a change within the mind and heart of the person who prays?

Perhaps an illustration will help us think our way through this problem. Last week a friend of yours met with a serious accident. Your first impulse, on learning what had happened, was to hurry to the hospital and see your friend. But the doctor prohibited visitors, and the only thing you could do was write your friend a letter of sympathy and encouragement. In the letter you assured him that he had the affection of scores of people, that all of them were deeply concerned in his welfare, and that you yourself were confident he would face his hard situation bravely and emerge from it victoriously. A few days later the nurse sent you word that your letter had been of immense help to the patient.

Within an hour after reading it he had brightened perceptibly, and had begun to regain his grip on himself. Presently he was on the road to recovery.

How did your letter bring that help? The letter did not, of course, mend his broken bones or heal his torn muscles. Neither did it change the nurse or the doctor. What the letter did do was change the man who received it, change him by thrusting new ideas into his mind. The letter told him of his many friends, reminding him of their interest and affection. As the patient read those words he realized he was not alone and forgotten. He was surrounded by the friendship of those who loved him. Then your letter stressed the faith you had in him, your confidence that he would meet his hard situation without whimpering, and eventually emerge from it as effective a man as he had been before. What a change those sentences wrought in the patient's inner feeling! He began to believe he could endure the pain after all. He began to realize he could enter active life again, resume his work, and carry to completion his half-finished undertakings. A new confidence in himself, a new conviction that the situation was nothing to fear, a new assurance that the future would be happy

after all—how swiftly and profoundly these new ideas changed that man's inner attitude and then his outward life! Altering an external situation is not our only way of helping our friends. By changing the ideas that fill their minds we often do quite as much for them.

Here is the kernel of the new conception of prayer. Experience and observation have convinced many of us that God does not alter external situations in answer to human petitions. After we have prayed broken bones are still broken, convalescence is still a long process, and the time lost from our work is still lost. Neither does God help us by changing other people. After we have prayed the nurse at the hospital is the same person she was before, and the doctor has exactly the same amount of professional knowledge and technical skill. The answer to our prayer is not a change precipitated in the external situation. Neither is it a change precipitated in other people. The answer to prayer is a change wrought in the mind of the person who prays—a change that appears first as the emergence of new ideas within the mind, and then as the attainment of new attitudes and new ranges of power.

How clearly this appears in many of the records of

answered prayer! Consider the testimony of Sherwood Eddy: "In 1896 I went to India as a missionary, carrying with me high hopes and youthful enthusiasm. But within a year I broke down from overwork, and soon came to the verge of nervous prostration. One morning, after a long and sleepless night, I cried to God to show me the way out of my trouble. What happened? An old verse from the Bible, flashing into my mind, altered the course of my life. 'He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. For the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water, springing up into eternal life.' As I thought of that verse I resolved to stop drawing on myself so constantly, and begin drawing upon God. I determined to set apart a quiet time every day in which I could relate my life to its Ultimate Source, regain the consciousness that in God I live and move and have my being. That was thirty years ago. Since then I have had literally not one hour of darkness or despair. To some measure at least I have attained emotional poise. The Eternal God has been my refuge, and underneath me I have felt the Everlasting Arms." [2] How did that immense help come? Through an

[2] See Sherwood Eddy, *Religion and Social Justice,* pp. 90-91.

idea, old and half-forgotten, brought quietly into the center of attention.

It is around this new conviction—that the answer to prayer is a change wrought in the ideas and attitudes of the man who prays—that the new beliefs about prayer and the new forms of prayer are gradually taking shape. Naturally some people are unaffected by this development. They cling to old beliefs and practices in religion as they cling to such beliefs and practices in other departments of life. But if you study the younger and the more progressive groups, the growing edge in the Christian community, you will see indubitable evidences of this change. Such people no longer pray for sudden and miraculous changes in the realm of Nature. They are convinced that God does not interfere in the processes of the nonhuman world. He might do so, of course, but the evidence of long experience and careful observation is that such divine interventions do not take place. Such individuals no longer pray for sudden and miraculous changes in the lives of other people. They are convinced that God does not alter one individual at the solicitation of another, or without the consent and coöperation of the individual who is to be transformed. God might do this, of

course, but the evidence of experience and observation is that such events never take place. Yet thousands of us who have reached these beliefs still pray, pray constantly. We pray for changes within ourselves. We ask for greater wisdom, greater patience, greater endurance, a greater willingness to spend and be spent for others. These prayers, we are convinced, are prayers that can be answered. We find they are answered, answered day after day, and answered in the case of numberless individuals. "Out of weakness they were made strong"—in that experience of inward renewal we see God's response to our cry for help.

Does this theory of prayer mean that we should never pray for others, or for causes outside our own little life? Certainly not. All it means is that the prayers we offer for other people and for outside causes should be prayers that God can answer by bringing a change within our own mind and heart. If in our prayers for others we ask God to do things we ourselves are unwilling to attempt, we can hardly expect an answer. If, in our prayers for the noble causes on which our generation has embarked, we try to persuade God to do our work for us, we should realize even while we are pray-

ing that such requests are the expression of our own indolence and inertia. Only when as we pray we offer ourselves as willing agents through whom —at any price in sacrificial devotion and persistent effort—our prayers can be answered, have we the right to expect that God will consider seriously what we are saying.

There is a significant difference between asking God to relieve poverty and unemployment, and asking God to show us what we can do to organize more intelligently the economic life of the community and, while this work is being planned and carried through, meet more generously the needs of those who are suffering. There is a sharp difference between praying that God will send world peace, and praying that God will help us develop within our own lives that spirit of tolerance and kindliness which—chiefly by influencing the attitudes of children—will lay the foundations of a new world friendship. There is a crucial difference between praying that God will make the other members of our family more considerate and Christlike, and praying that God will help us reveal within ourselves those qualities of patience, forgiveness, and unfaltering devotion which will evoke similar qualities in those who live with us.

One type of prayer will, as far as past experience indicates, never be answered. For the other type of prayer the answer is already waiting, waiting beside the mind and heart of the man who prays.

IV

The final question about prayer, a question now asked by numberless college students, is the most difficult of all. It was never faced by the men who wrote the Bible or by the men who laid the foundations of the Church. There is not a syllable in the recorded teaching of Jesus which bears directly upon it. It is a question which, like many of the questions now perplexing our generation, arose when the modern world took shape. The question is this. Granted that helpful and significant ideas emerge within the mind, and granted that they emerge with special frequency and power during periods of prayer. Is God the source of these ideas? May they not be the product of the mind itself, suddenly stimulated into special activity by the act of worship? A student in a New England college once put the question to me in this form. "I admit that when I pray new ideas and ideals stir within me. But have you any right to say that it is God who sends them? It seems to me that

the laws of mental action, particularly the law of the association of ideas, will explain everything. The mind itself, stimulated to new activity, creates these fine thoughts and noble impulses. Why drag God into the situation? Why not take the simpler of the two explanations?" Obviously this is a question which cannot be answered by referring the questioner to a verse in the Bible or a statement in an ancient confession of faith. When the Bible was being written and when the creeds were being formulated such questions, like the questions dealing with modern politics and modern economics, lay far in the future. Is there any convincing answer to this modern inquiry?

We must grant, and grant frankly, that many of our helpful and significant ideas have some such simple and clearly traceable growth. More than once, as that New England undergraduate implied, the law of the association of ideas will disclose their starting point. At Christmas you hear a carol your mother taught you years ago, and that music brings back to your mind the memory of the home in which you learned the carol, and then the thought of those who were members of that family circle. Suddenly you recall a friend of your mother who was, when you

last heard of her, in sorrow and need. You suddenly resolve to help that woman as generously as you can. On Christmas Day the money you send arrives, and in this wholly unexpected fashion the course of that woman's life is completely altered. Trace your generous act back to its starting point and you will find the familiar law of the association of ideas. In such a situation where is there any suggestion of divine action?

But suppose the analysis is carried farther back. What if God worked through the law of the association of ideas to bring into your mind the kindly impulse that had such significant consequences? What if the mechanisms of mental action which modern psychology is so helpfully disclosing are the means through which God does His work? Consider again the analogy of the telephone. When you speak to me by telephone your words are created an inch from my ear by a vibrating diaphragm set in motion by electrical currents of varying power. I might say, and say quite truly, that the message was created by that diaphragm. I might discuss the laws of electrical and mechanical action which make it possible for that thin plate to produce intelligible sounds and sentences of significant meaning. All this

would be interesting and scientifically accurate, but it would say nothing of the ultimate source of the telephone message. You are that ultimate source, and the mechanisms of the telephone are the means you use to bring your thoughts to me. Some of us, studying life and people, have come to the conclusion that there are times when God deliberately sends His ideas, His purposes, and His wisdom into waiting human minds. He does this by making use of the mechanisms of the mind, by working through such things as the law of the association of ideas. Behind the process which science discloses as the immediate cause of our action stands the ultimate cause, the living God.

Can we prove our theory? We can at least say this. Such a theory enables us to gather into a consistent and a reasonable whole many facts about life which force themselves steadily on the mind. The nature of the universe and the life-process impels us to believe in God. The experiences of numberless men and women force us to conclude that God does touch human lives. The new theory that this divine activity takes place within the mind, follows the laws of mental action, and utilizes the mechanisms that psychological study discloses, gives us an understand-

ing of the way in which God might carry on His work in us, through us, and for us. If science has the right to frame hypotheses that sweep into an ordered whole great numbers of apparently unrelated facts, has not religion the right to build up a theory that gives us a possible answer to the problem of the nature of the divine activity to-day?

V

Suppose a man accepts this theory about prayer. Suppose he assumes that the answers that will come when he prays will be ideas and ideals quietly emerging within his own mind. How can he make himself more receptive to the messages God thus seeks to send?

This is a question which each of us must answer for himself. Through personal experience each individual must locate the acts which make him most sensitive to the noble influences falling on us all, and most able to respond to the finer impulses rising within the heart. In the past it was believed there were only a few ways of praying, only a few valid forms of religious devotion. To-day we are beginning to realize there are as many roads to God as there are pilgrim souls, and that there are as many

ways to pray—each authentic—as there are people who try to pray. Kneeling in silence, pouring out one's heart in eager petition, standing quietly before the splendor of Nature, yielding to the spell of noble music or the ritual of a beautiful religious service, forgetting one's self in the service of others—any of these acts may bring us within the reach of God's eager love. Along any of these roads we may find God's desire disclosing itself. Amid any of these experiences a truth which God has long been seeking to reveal may rise in starlike loveliness before the waiting mind.

Some years ago a college student gave me this account of his own most convincing religious experience. "A year ago last Christmas I forfeited the usual round of holiday parties and took a job in our local post office. With the money I earned I bought some food and clothing for a family in desperate need. I shall never forget the night I delivered those Christmas presents. The weather was raw and cold, and I had to drive about thirty miles to one of the worst slums in Chicago. I finally reached the tenement where this family lived, and made my way up four flights of dingy, rickety stairs. The eight people I had come to help were living in two small and ter-

ribly dirty rooms. The father was dying of tuberculosis, and the mother was on the verge of collapse from nervous and physical exhaustion. The six children were dressed literally in rags. When they opened the door and saw me standing in the hall laden with presents they could hardly speak. To tell the truth, I couldn't say much myself. As I left those rooms and walked down those stairs, I was suddenly sure of the presence of God. Not all the arguments on earth can make me doubt that experience. I know God was there with me. I know that as I tried to help that family His life touched mine." "Everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." How many people, through all the years, have found those words true!

CHAPTER VIII

DOES GOD EVER TAKE THE INITIATIVE?

I

THE theory of God's activity advanced in the preceding chapter seems to some people inadequate and unsatisfying. Brought up on the belief that God can and often does precipitate sudden and miraculous changes not only in human hearts but also in the realm of Nature, these individuals find it hard to readjust their ideas and accept the theory that God works only in and through people, and that His activity consists in bringing new ideas and ideals within the circle of men's attention. When the implications of the new theory are further elaborated and the suggestion is made that God's gift of new ideas and ideals is conditioned by our willingness to take the gift, many people reject the modern argument impatiently.

This attitude was recently expressed by a middle-aged man who flatly disagreed with a sermon he had heard on the subject of God's help. The minister,

who had been stating the modern point of view, had said that when we pray we open our mind and heart and let God's help flow in. The analogy he had employed was that of a camper who visits a mountain cabin and flings wide the doors and windows. Quietly and of their own accord the sunshine and fresh air stream in. So, the minister had said, God's help flows into human hearts when men open their lives to the divine influence. But the illustration did not satisfy this listener. He said impatiently, "The preacher ended his discourse just as he reached the most important part of his problem. We all agree that when a man asks for God's help and deliberately opens his life to receive it the help comes. But suppose the man makes no such effort and has no such desire. Suppose he never prays, never gives even a thought to higher things. Will God not force an entrance into his life? The modern theory implies that God is passive, says that until the camper opens the cabin door the sunshine and fresh air wait impotently outside. But is God as inactive as this analogy indicates? Christianity has always insisted that God makes vigorous advances toward us, that on occasion He deliberately invades our world, transforms our life, and redirects our career. The story

of Paul's conversion is a classic example. Does the new theory leave any place for a divine initiative?"

Obviously such a question goes to the heart of religion. If God works only so far as we permit Him to work then the range of our joint accomplishment is limited by the human factor. If, on the other hand, God works—as historic Christianity has always maintained—not only in us and through us but also beyond us and sometimes in spite of us, then the limitations and failures of human beings do not necessitate a breakdown of the enterprise God is attempting with them. Face to face with this crucial question, what answer can we give to the doubts and perplexities of thoughtful people?

II

Many people to-day, asked if God ever takes the initiative, deny all possibility of divine intervention. They tell us that modern science has disproved miracles and rendered the belief in an interfering God untenable. Many of these people go further and declare that God—if there is a God at all—is only a spectator of human affairs, a deity who watches from a safe distance the turmoil accompanying the evolu-

tion of our growing world and our struggling race. When men rouse themselves to a united and a highly intelligent endeavor the group finds itself capable of immense achievement, an achievement which, though purely human in origin, is often attributed—mistakenly enough—to God. As a matter of fact God has nothing to do with the accomplishment. He cannot claim even as much credit as a general can claim at the close of a long campaign. The general was, in a real sense, the leader of the army, and the soldiers carried out his plans and responded to his shrewd direction and constant encouragement. But, according to these doubters, God takes no such active part in men's affairs to-day. The human group does everything, and while it is fighting its own battle in its own way and with its own resources the Divine General merely stands, a venerable figure, on the cosmic battlefield. The idea underlies much modern poetry. In one of her most widely quoted poems Angela Morgan puts these words into the mouth of God.

> No help shall come from the scarlet skies
> Till the people arise!
> Till the people rise my arm is weak,
> I cannot speak till the people speak,

When men are dumb my voice is dumb,
I cannot come till the people come.
Millions on millions pray to me
But not one comes to set me free,
Of all who plead from night to day
Not one has hearkened and heard Me pray!
And the Lord God's presence was white, so white,
Like a pillar of stars against the night.[1]

Such a God could certainly never take the initiative. He could only hope that His human children would do the work laid upon them. When the work was done they—not He—would deserve the credit.

Other people to-day, facing this problem of the nature and the extent of the divine activity, adopt a thoroughgoing supernaturalism. They insist that God is always at work in our world, and that essentially miraculous events are of daily or even hourly occurrence. This belief underlies Roman Catholic teaching and practice, and permeates certain sections of the Protestant world. We find many cults that proclaim a gospel of divine healing, divine rescue from poverty and domestic unhappiness, and divine assistance in attaining prosperity. A leader in one of these groups has recently made this extravagant

[1] Angela Morgan, "God Prays." In *The World's Great Religious Poetry*, p. 411.

promise. "If you are sick the Holy Spirit will heal you. If you are in financial need the Holy Spirit will show you the way to prosperity. If you are unhappy the Holy Spirit will adjust conditions and bring about harmony. If your need is urgent telegraph us. We make no charge for our services." [2] Obviously such an individual has no doubts as to the divine initiative. According to his theory God is constantly pouring miraculous blessings on everyone. God will do anything, do it at any time, and do it for anybody.

Occasionally we find people who extend this expectation from the human realm to the realm of Nature. They claim that God will work miracles not only within human lives but also in the natural world. Many of us are familiar with the alleged answers to prayer recorded on the walls of shrines and in holy places thronged by pilgrims. Less naïve but quite as significant are the statements that emanate from certain Protestant groups. Only a few years ago, according to one of our religious periodicals, the Governor of South Carolina issued the following proclamation: "Whereas I believe that Divine Providence has permitted the boll weevil and other physi-

[2] See C. W. Ferguson, *The Confusion of Tongues*, p. 226.

cal, social, and economic evils not only as judgment on our people for their sins but also as a means of bringing them back to Him; now therefore I, Thomas G. McLeod, Governor of South Carolina, do hereby designate Sunday, June 10, 1923, as a day of fasting and prayer to God for deliverance from the ravages of the boll weevil." [8] The God implied in that proclamation is sharply different from the God implied in Angela Morgan's poem. This God can send a plague of weevils and then either recall or destroy them. The God pictured in the poem could do nothing of the kind. He could only watch the weevils invade the cotton fields, and hope that human beings would find a way to destroy the hungry insects.

For some of us neither of these extreme answers to the question at issue is satisfying. We cannot believe that a God who started the process which finally led up to the emergence of human life now takes no part in the affairs of men. Neither can we believe that God manipulates the laws of Nature and the forces operating within human lives in any such arbitrary and extravagant fashion as the contemporary defenders of miracle maintain. It seems to us that God must do more than the first and less

[8] Reported in *The Christian Century,* July 12, 1923, p. 868.

than the second theory implies. Is there a middle-ground belief which a thoughtful person can accept?

III

When we attempt to define and describe God's initiative in the world to-day there are several facts around which our theory—whatever it finally proves to be—must be built. It is the failure to consider and inter-relate these facts that leads many well-meaning but unreflective individuals to adopt fantastic notions about divine help, particularly acts involving initiative.

To begin with, we must admit that it is theoretically possible for God to do unpredictable and startling things, either in the human realm or the realm of Nature. If, at the beginning, God was powerful enough to call the universe and the human race into being it follows logically that He is now powerful enough to intervene in the present affairs of the natural world or the human race. It is theoretically possible for God to transform all of us, suddenly making sick people well and well people sick. It is theoretically possible for God to change conditions on a cotton plantation, sending boll weevils into one field and taking them from another.

A God great enough to start the world surely must be great enough to change any of its present situations.

Many people, coming to this point in their thinking, stop short. Realizing that God might work miracles they conclude that God therefore does work miracles. The fact that God might deliberately refrain from doing something He has the power to do never occurs to them. Some time ago a woman who was suffering from severe spinal trouble and who was waiting in a hospital for a major operation sent me this pitiful letter. "Why can't God cure me without this operation, without these surgeons, and without these weeks of convalescence in a cast? If He was powerful enough to create human beings in the first place, why isn't He powerful enough to cure their aches and pains to-day, and do it without human assistance? Some of my friends who believe in divine healing are urging me to refuse this operation, leave the hospital, and trust God for a cure. They say He is mighty enough to heal me if I will only give Him a chance. What do you advise?" The flaw in that logic is evident to anyone who thinks carefully. Because God might do certain things it does not follow that He will do those things. Because the father of a

family might show certain extravagant favors to one child we must not conclude that he will. Perhaps, even though he might give that child immense benefits, he may persistently refuse to do so. He may recall the interests of the family as a whole, remember his effort to force on all the children certain obligations and responsibilities, and then deliberately refuse to show favoritism.

Beside our first fact we must, then, place a second. Though God might do many things and work in many ways, His activity in our world and in human lives seems to be carefully and deliberately restricted. Centuries of observation and experience have shown what the restrictions are. We realize that God now does His work, apparently all His work, through people. When we seek evidences of divine activity to-day we must therefore look in the human rather than the nonhuman realm. When we raise questions about the divine initiative we must seek the answers not in earthquake, wind, and fire but in the still, small voice which makes itself heard within a sensitive human heart.

This fact was, unfortunately, not known to the men who wrote the Bible. Like many of the facts on which our modern civilization is built it eluded those

thinkers of long ago. They believed, as many unreflective people still believe, that God works not only through people but also through the forces of Nature. Thus they said that when God wanted to deliver His people from Egypt He divided the Red Sea until the Hebrews had passed through, and then swept the waters together when the Egyptians entered the treacherous defile. Similarly they said that when God wanted to release Paul and Silas from the prison in Philippi He sent an earthquake to rattle open the doors. To-day many of us have abandoned these ancient theories and adopted in their place a new conception of the divine activity. We have adopted it because centuries of experience have convinced us that the old belief cannot be true, and that a new belief must be substituted for it. We are now certain that God leaves the mechanisms of the natural realm to operate in their blind and relentless way, and that He does what He does by working through people. Our new conviction is based on the one sure foundation, the witness of actual and long-continued experience. Experience has shown that if a twisted spine is to be straightened the chances of success are far greater if we trust a trained surgeon than they are if we take the patient out of the hospital and pray for

divine healing. Experience has shown that if a cotton field is to be freed from weevils the owner would do better to consult the experts at the State College of Agriculture than to persuade the Governor to proclaim a day of fasting and prayer. Why does God thus limit His activity? Have we any idea why, when He might work through the forces of Nature as well as through human beings, He deliberately restricts His operations to the human realm? The answer is fairly clear. If God interfered, even occasionally and with the best intentions, in the natural world, men would never be able to understand and control the forces by which they are surrounded and amid which they must live and work. In the final analysis God's noninterference in the processes of Nature is one of our greatest blessings. It is the thing that enables us to discover how Nature has acted, how Nature will act, and how we can find ways to protect ourselves against Nature.

We can now add to our sequence the most significant fact of all. Experience has shown that by working through human beings, and by working in that way alone, God is able to affect profoundly the course of events. Human lives far and near may be altered, and gradually the very structure of the

natural world may be modified. History gives two peculiarly striking examples.

A century ago a boy was born in an inconspicuous home in France. At that time the grip of disease on all living things was unbroken. Plants, animals, and men were at the mercy of trivial infections and premature death. Worse still, no one could understand why living creatures died and died so swiftly. Louis Pasteur changed that situation, changed it for the whole world, and changed it for all time. He discovered that most of these infections and deaths were caused by micro-organisms that gained access to the body and began to multiply there. By killing these micro-organisms, through the application of heat or of an antiseptic fluid, the infection could be healed and the threat of death averted. The work of Pasteur and his successors slowly transformed not only human life but also vast areas of the world of Nature. Suppose it was God who found Pasteur and put into his mind the new truth that has had such momentous results. Then God, working through one human being, changed the course of history.

The other example is even more arresting. Nineteen centuries ago a boy was born in one of the tiny villages in a frontier province of the Roman Empire.

At that time selfishness, cruelty, and fear blackened the world. Slavery was universal, child-exposure and child-desertion were openly advocated, human life was so cheap that gladiators were slaughtered for purposes of public entertainment, and the idea that the resources of an entire community might be mobilized for the enrichment and ennoblement of the common life was unknown. How completely Jesus has changed the world! He began changing it nineteen centuries ago, and the men who have caught his spirit have continued changing it ever since. They have gradually obliterated the cruelty, wiped out the heartlessness, and reorganized community life around the new principles of respect for and kindness toward every human being. Much of this work has, of course, been done by agencies and individuals outside the Christian group. The work is, obviously, still unfinished. But it is no accident that has led humanity to divide the calendar into the years before Christ and the years after him. He completely changed the course of history. Suppose it was God who found Jesus, and put into Jesus' mind the ideas and ideals which have had such momentous consequences. Then God, working through one man, altered life for the race.

IV

With these facts clearly before us we can understand how and where and when God takes the initiative in bringing His help to-day. It seems clear, to begin with, that God is steadily leading the human race toward a wiser and a kinder way of living. How does He lead humanity? Century after century the blind life-process produces a host of human beings. In that vast throng God finds, here and there, men and women who are capable of grasping new truth, new beauty, new ideals. Where and how these leaders of the race gain their phenomenal capacities no one can explain. Why should Shakespere, son of an insignificant butcher and a woman who could scarcely write her own name, possess literary gifts of unrivaled splendor? Why should Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, reveal spiritual capacities that have never been equalled? No one can say. We call these men geniuses, we say that their extraordinary ability is due to the fortunate combination of varied inheritance strains, but in the final analysis the secret of their power remains unexplained. Some of us, studying these lives and noting their pervasive and persistent influence for good, are convinced that God found these men and

then poured into their waiting mind the ideas and ideals that have so profoundly affected the course of human life. It was through these men, and through lesser leaders like them, that God led humanity upward from the cruelty and the selfishness, the ignorance and the blindness of the past. It is through the geniuses of our own day—in art and music, in science and in literature, in religion and philosophy—that God is leading our generation still farther along the upward road. That vast movement which we call progress does not represent the blind struggle of an unaided humanity. It represents, so some of us believe, the deliberate and sustained effort of God, a God who finds men capable of understanding new truth and seeing new beauty, and who then—working through them—leads our race forward.

The strong men keep coming on!
They go down shot, hanged, sick, broken,
But they live on, fighting and singing,
The strong mothers pulling them on,
The strong mothers pulling them on from a dark sea,
a great prairie, a long mountain.
Call Hallelujah! Call Amen! Call deep thanks!
The strong men keep coming on.[4]

[4] Carl Sandburg, "Upstream." In *The Third Book of Modern Verse*, p. 249.

In that unending sequence of human leaders we see God. In the work they find themselves able to do, and in the influence for good they exert on their fellow men, we see God. Humanity is not saving itself. Through human leaders God is taking the initiative and saving us.

It also seems clear that God is constantly inspiring ordinary people to meet the needs of those about them. This experience of being led to help someone else, and finding later that the assistance we gave came at a singularly opportune time, is familiar to us all. In the midst of the day's work or the night's silence the thought of something we might do for one of our friends flashes into the mind. Granted that other ideas, ideas of a far less creditable nature, also emerge there. Because some of our thoughts and desires are evil, and because they bear clear marks of their origin in our animal inheritance, we must not conclude that no thoughts and desires from a finer source can make their way through the recesses of the mind. What if God utilizes, at least occasionally, the mechanisms of memory and imagination to disclose to us His purpose and His desire? Granted that the impulse to do a particular thing for a particular person may sometimes be misleading,

and may if followed unreflectively and blindly lead us to an unfortunate exhibition of tactlessness. Because we often make mistakes, and because we often do well-meaning things in a singularly thoughtless way, we must not argue that God can have nothing to do with the experience of inspiration at its best. What if our lack of sensitiveness and imaginative sympathy creates difficulties for God as it certainly creates difficulties for the human friends who seek to use us in their effort to help others? When all the objections have been raised, and when due allowance has been made for coincidence and for our own overvaluation of our own kindnesses, most of us still find a long record of impressive experiences which can neither be overlooked nor analyzed away. Time and again we have felt impelled to help certain people in certain ways, and time and again we have found—after the help was given —that it came literally as an answer to our friends' prayers. The same experience has come in our own time of need, with the rôles reversed. Other people, following an inward impulse to kindness, did their best for us, and their action—coming at a crucial moment in our career—actually redirected the course of our life. Most of us, looking back across the years,

find that these things have happened not once but many times. To deny them, or to make light of their significance, would be to belie our deepest convictions. To us these experiences reveal God—God helping other people through us, and God helping us through other people. In these situations, we are convinced, God took the initiative.

There is one other type of experience which must be mentioned, one in which God takes an active rather than a passive part. Some of us have come to believe that God is constantly trying to change individuals, lead them out of indolence, selfishness, and sin, and raise them to nobler attitudes and finer habits. We hold this belief because we have seen this change take place in many lives, and because the change seems traceable to an influence which worked on the individual from outside. He did not deliver himself from his former attitudes and habits. Rather he was delivered. Sometimes the power which brought the change can be traced to a new idea or a new ideal suddenly thrust into the center of the man's attention. Sometimes the saving influence is traceable to something another person said or did. Sometimes the trail is lost completely, and we can only say that the man's personality was reshaped and

the course of his career altered under the influence of a multitude of obscure forces. But from all these instances one important fact emerges. The man did not lift himself to the new level. Something from outside lifted him. Robert Louis Stevenson has described the experience in words of singular vividness. "I can remember a time when I was very idle. I have no idea why I ceased to be so. Of that great change which decided all this later part of my life and turned me from one whose business it was to shirk into one whose business it is to strive and persevere, I can only say it seems as though it all was done by someone else. I was never conscious of a struggle and I never registered a vow. Seemingly I had nothing to do with the matter. I came about like a well-handled ship. There stood at the wheel that Unknown Steersman men call God."

V

Once a man sees these facts clearly and accepts this interpretation of them the quality of his life will begin to change. Prayer will mean quite as much to him as it meant to the men of the past, though their theories about it were utterly different from his own. Faith in God's active and persistent help will be quite

as strong in his heart as it was in the hearts of earlier Christians. He will see what prayer can do and what it cannot do, what type of prayer is answered, and how and where the answer comes. He will understand the way in which God helps us, and along what roads God advances toward us. Knowing where to look for evidences of divine activity he will be neither perplexed nor dismayed when in other spheres he sees no signs of God's effort in human behalf. As the years pass he will detect with greater and greater clearness the work God is doing for his generation. When gifted men lead their fellows to new knowledge, new kindness, and a new understanding of beauty in any of its forms, he will recognize in these men and their influence for good an effort God is making. When he finds himself impelled in silent and secret ways to do his best for others, or when he finds other people similarly impelled to do their best for him, he will know that God stands behind, within, and around those experiences. When he finds forces for good constantly impinging on his own life, pushing him quietly but relentlessly in the direction of a greater wisdom, a wider kindness, and a firmer courage, he will realize that God is at work within his own soul. And when,

casting himself and all his care on the Everlasting Arms, he finds himself sustained and renewed in spirit, he will know from the witness of inner experience that God is as real, as near, as loving, and as helpful as the men of the past believed. We do not find our way through the years unaided and alone. We are surrounded by God's love, we are led by God's wisdom, we are sustained by God's strength.

> The sphere of the supernal powers
> Impinges on this world of ours,
> The breath of a diviner air
> Blows down the narrow aisles of prayer.
> Then all our sorrow, pain, and doubt
> A Great Compassion clasps about,
> With smile of trust and folded hands
> The quiet soul in waiting stands
> To feel, as flowers the sun and dew,
> The One True Life its own renew.[5]

[5] John Greenleaf Whittier.

CHAPTER IX

RIVAL CONCEPTIONS OF JESUS CURRENT TO-DAY

I

ANYONE who studies our present religious situation carefully will soon discover there are two entirely different conceptions of Jesus current in the modern world. It is the conflict between these two views which brings to an *impasse* many discussions between individuals of different faiths, and which accounts for a great deal of the confusion in the minds of those who are emotionally attached to one view of Jesus and intellectually attracted by the other. If we are to help the individuals who are beset by doubts as to Jesus' place in history and his significance for the human race we must face the conflicting claims of these two conceptions of Jesus, and then quietly choose between them.

The first of these conceptions is the one offered by the Roman Catholic Church. Writing half a century ago for the benefit of outsiders Cardinal Gibbons

gave this commendably clear account of the Catholic view of Jesus. "We believe that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is perfect God and perfect Man. Out of love for us, and in order to rescue us from the miseries entailed upon us by the disobedience of our first parents, the Divine Word descended from heaven and became Man in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the operation of the Holy Ghost. After having led a life of obscurity for about thirty years Jesus Christ began His public career. For three years He went about doing good—giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing all kinds of diseases, raising the dead to life, and preaching throughout Judea the new gospel of peace. On Good Friday He was crucified on Mount Calvary, and thus purchased for us redemption by His death. On Easter Sunday He manifested His divine power by raising Himself to life, and having spent forty days on earth instructing His disciples He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives." [1]

If we were to sum up in a single sentence this interpretation of Jesus we would say that it pictures him as a supernatural being, a divine Savior, who by

[1] See James Cardinal Gibbons, *Faith of Our Fathers,* Chapter I.

his life and even more by his death rescued his followers from doom and procured for them eternal life. To say that Jesus was, during his brief stay on Earth, "perfect Man" does not obliterate the fact that according to this theory he was also "perfect God." The essential emphasis of this theory, as any Catholic will admit, is on the supernatural nature of the Divine Redeemer, the God-Man. What is the source of these beliefs? They were drawn from the Bible, from the Bible read in an uncritical way and regarded as a divinely inspired, verbally infallible, and thoroughly consistent document. Statements found in one part of the Scripture were combined with statements found in other parts, on the assumption that all were true and mutually complementary. Thus the traditional picture of Jesus was built up bit by bit, and for centuries Roman Catholicism has held it before the world.

The early Protestants took from the Catholic Church this impressive portrait. Luther and his followers disagreed at many points with their Catholic opponents, but in the interpretation of Jesus and his work the two groups stood on common ground. For each Jesus was essentially a supernatural being, a divine Savior, whose greatest single act was to die

for a lost world. Consider the statement made by the Westminster Confession and compare it with the one just quoted from Cardinal Gibbons. After stating that Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity and that he was born miraculously, the Westminster Confession continues: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father, and hath purchased not only reconciliation but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father hath given to him." [2] The similarity between the two interpretations of Jesus is obvious. Here, as in the Catholic teaching, the life and work of Jesus reach their climax in a redemptive act on Calvary. These beliefs, taught by all the early Protestant leaders, found vivid expression in the sermons and hymns of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. In 1707 Isaac Watts published a stanza which was destined to be sung by millions of Protestants.

> Alas, and did my Saviour bleed,
> And did my Sovereign die?
> Would He devote that sacred head
> For such a worm as I?

[2] The Westminster Confession, Chapter VIII, Section 5.

That hymn is still a favorite in many Protestant circles. It still represents the belief of many of our contemporaries.

II

But recent years have seen, as all religious leaders now admit, the emergence of an entirely different conception of Jesus. This new view has gained wide acceptance in university circles, and as far as the rising generation is concerned, it seems to have an appeal which its rival does not possess. To a certain extent this new view was anticipated by the teaching of many of the liberals of the last century, and by some of the men who in still earlier times were dubbed heretics. But the Biblical scholarship and the historical investigations of the last few decades have now given this view of Jesus a clarity and a completeness which were unknown even thirty years ago. Professor Montague of the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University has recently stated the second interpretation of Jesus with great skill.

"A simple Jewish teacher with a mystic sense of his own mission implores all men to dedicate their lives without reserve to the ideal of universal love,

and thereby gain eternal life. The teacher further gives assurance that whoever wills to have this infinite boon may gain it regardless of earthly status, strength, or learning, regardless even of past wickedness. Thus his teaching puts the most high glory within reach of the most lowly. To have discovered and proclaimed the way of absolute beauty, to have shown that it is free to all, to have lived gently and ardently, and then to have died terribly as a supreme exemplification of his own teaching—that is enough. For us to try to better the picture by ornamenting its frame with biological and psychological anomalies such as a virgin birth and a miraculous absence of all sin and all ignorance verges on the tawdry. But for Jesus' immediate successors such an effort was understandable and pardonable. They could see no better way of honoring their friend and celebrating the glory and solace of his message than by following the well-worn path of mythological custom—first imputing to Jesus a monopoly of all virtue and all wisdom, and then loading down his birth, life, and death with physical signs and wonders." [3]

Obviously this interpretation of Jesus can never be reconciled with the interpretation advanced by Roman

[3] William P. Montague, *Belief Unbound,* p. 17.

Catholicism and the conservative branch of Protestantism. The two portraits are radically and essentially different. If we were to sum up in a single sentence the new view of Jesus we would say it pictures him as a human being, a supreme leader and inspirer, who revealed to mankind a new and singularly beautiful way to live. According to this view Jesus' major contribution to humanity was not to die on the cross. It was to live and think, and discover for his fellow men truths of profound and permanent value.

What is the source of this new conception of Jesus? It too is drawn from the Bible, but from the Bible read and interpreted in the light of modern knowledge and modern methods of Bible study. The liberal scholars of our time are convinced that the Bible is not, as our predecessors thought, a divinely inspired, verbally infallible, and completely consistent document. Rather the Bible is a collection of ancient religious writings, each of which must be studied in the light of the religious beliefs and social situations existing at the time of its composition. A certain verse in the Bible may thus be—according to the modern theory—wholly true, partially true, or not at all true. In studying the Bible a reader must apply

to the passage before him the same tests of reason, consistency, logic, and fidelity to fact which are applied to all the literary records which have come down from the past. When the material in the four Gospels is studied in this fashion two significant facts are soon disclosed.

The first is that a period of nearly forty years elapsed between the death of Jesus and the writing of the first of the existing records of his life, the Gospel of Mark. During that period many of the facts of Jesus' career were forgotten, and many legends crept into the fast-fading story as men tried to fill the bewildering gaps. We can trace this process when we compare Mark's brief story of Jesus' life with the accounts found in the three later Gospels. There is every reason to believe that a development which we can see going on after the writing of the first Gospel must have gone on, to some extent at least, before its composition.

The other significant fact is this. During the earliest years of the Christian movement its adherents were incessantly and contemptuously accused of following a man who had been executed by the Roman authorities as a criminal. The crucifixion of Jesus was, as Paul confessed frankly, a stumblingblock to

the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Until that tragic event could be explained, transformed from a disgrace into a thing of splendor, there was little chance that Christianity could win followers in either the Jewish or the Gentile world. Thus during the years before the story of Jesus' life gained fixed form in the gospel narratives the leaders in the Christian movement were busy formulating an explanation of his death which would rob it of its discreditable elements. Paul soon devised and popularized an interpretation of the tragedy which eventually became the orthodox one. Paul insisted that God had planned in advance the death of Jesus, that Jesus—the divine redeemer—had shared the plan, and that Jesus had come from heaven to earth with the deliberate intention of dying and thus fulfilling the plan. Thus the execution of Jesus, apparently a sudden and disgraceful termination of his life, was in reality the exact fulfillment of a divine purpose. Through the sacrifice of the supernatural savior the eternal life which Adam had forfeited for all his descendants had been regained for at least some of them. Here, as far as modern scholars can discover, is the origin of the strange story which so soon fastened itself around the figure of a martyred Galilean teacher, and which ever

since has formed the culminating incident in the orthodox Christian epic. It is through this later and highly elaborated religion about Jesus that we must, modern students of the Bible tell us, make our way back to the simpler religion of Jesus himself.

III

Opinions will, undoubtedly, always differ as to the relative merits of these two contrasting conceptions of Jesus. Suppose, now, a person who is familiar with ancient religious writings and who realizes that a large amount of error is usually found in them comes to the conclusion that—in all probability—the new interpretation of Jesus is nearer the truth than the ancient one. Suppose such a person begins to think of Jesus, not as a supernatural savior who died for men, but as a singularly wise and noble leader who lived and thought for them. What analysis and summary will such a person make as he studies the recorded teachings of Jesus?

When we examine the ideas advanced by any teacher or leader we always find they contain two entirely different strands. The first is made up of the current and conventional beliefs which the teacher or leader shared, usually unreflectively, with the people

about him. The second strand, on the contrary, is made up of the new and original ideas which the thinker himself either discovered or reformulated, and which represent his contribution to the ever-growing store of human knowledge. To confuse the two strands is to do the teacher or leader a grave injustice. The two must be kept separate, and one quietly laid aside while the other is retained.

The story of Christopher Columbus and his discovery of the new world offers an interesting illustration. When Columbus sailed from Spain in 1492 there were two major ideas in his mind. The first was that India lay directly to the west, and that if his vessels sailed for a few days—or at the most a few weeks—they would find themselves in an Indian harbor. This was a belief which Columbus shared with many of the explorers and map-makers of his time and which, as subsequent events showed, was entirely mistaken. The next land west of Spain was not India. It was America. The other idea in Columbus' mind was his own brave and daring belief that it was safe to sail westward on the unexplored Atlantic. Columbus insisted that his little ships would not fall off the edge of a flat Earth, that they would not encounter dragons, and that they would not

tumble into the setting Sun. They would be perfectly safe, even if they were venturing into the unknown. This second idea was Columbus' own conviction, and as subsequent events proved it was not only true but of the greatest importance to humanity. Our race can never honor Columbus too highly for this second belief, the belief which gave men an entirely new continent. In discussing Columbus' contribution to human life we face the embarrassing fact that when, on October 12, 1492, he sighted land he thought he had reached India and hastily gave the brown-skinned people who met him the name "Indians." In this belief Columbus was, of course, demonstrably wrong. The new land was America, not India. The people there were Americans, not Indians. But to-day we quietly overlook the minor point in which Columbus was mistaken, and revere him for the great truth he grasped and the new world he disclosed. If anyone insisted that, in order to honor Columbus, we should have to agree with everything he said and call America India as he did, we should stare at that person incredulously. That would be a strange way to honor the achievement of a brave man who, even if he did make a few blunders, showed humanity the path to a new world.

In Jesus' beliefs we find this same double strand. On some subjects Jesus evidently agreed with the uninformed people of his day. At other points in his thinking Jesus broke away from contemporary restrictions and stated new and profoundly significant truths. The failure to distinguish between these two strands in Jesus' thought, and the misguided attempt to prove that both are true and permanently valuable, have led many Christians into hopeless confusion. Only as we differentiate between the transient errors and the permanent truths in the sayings of Jesus can we locate in his teaching its elements of genuine value, and apply his wisdom intelligently to the problems of the modern world.

IV

What, now, were the ideas which Jesus shared with the uninformed men of his day and which later generations, thanks to an ampler knowledge and a wider experience, have quietly laid aside? To begin with, Jesus' contemporaries believed in the existence and the malevolent activity of a host of evil spirits. To these unseen beings most of the diseases known in the ancient world were attributed. Jesus apparently shared this familiar and mistaken first-century

belief.[4] The men of Jesus' day also believed that miracles were constantly taking place in the realm of Nature, and that these miraculous occurrences were the work of supernatural powers. As any reader of ancient literature knows, comets were regarded as divine warnings, natural disasters were interpreted as divine punishments, and deliverances from danger and death were counted divine favors. Jesus seems to have shared this common belief in miracles.[5] The Jews of Jesus' day were also convinced that the existing world order was soon to end, and that the long-awaited Kingdom of God was presently to be established on the Earth. The Jewish writings of that period are filled with references to this imminent catastrophe and with descriptions of the new and happier era so soon to begin. Jesus evidently shared this familiar belief. One of his recorded sayings seems to indicate that he believed this colossal change would take place within the lifetime of his generation.[6]

Beside these points at which Jesus' ideas were deeply influenced by contemporary beliefs which we now realize were mistaken, there are other points at which Jesus seems to have been somewhat limited in

[4] Mark vii. 29. [5] Matthew x. 8. [6] Mark ix. 1.

his outlook by the restricted knowledge of his day. The rabbis of Jesus' time believed that their sacred writings (now known to us in the Old Testament) were divinely inspired and verbally infallible, and that these writings could be made to yield authentic information on many puzzling subjects. Jesus seems to have agreed with the rabbis, and on at least two occasions we find him using the Old Testament in a way that seems to us to-day not only unwarranted but frankly illogical.[7] The common people of Jesus' time were bitterly suspicious of wealthy men and deeply hostile toward them. When we recall the fact that in antiquity large fortunes could usually be traced to some form of injustice or dishonesty we can understand this distrust of wealth and this antipathy toward the rich. Jesus seems to have shared—on some occasions at least—the popular feeling, and one of his sayings seems to imply that he believed a rich man's only hope of entering the Kingdom of Heaven lay in a special miracle wrought by God.[8]

Should the Christians of our time follow Jesus' teaching on these points? No more than modern men should follow Columbus' belief and call America India. The attempt to agree with Jesus on the sub-

[7] Mark xii. 26, 27, 35-37. [8] Mark x. 23-27.

jects in which Jesus was palpably and demonstrably mistaken would force us back hundreds of years in our knowledge. It would make us return, for example, to the exploded theory of the demonic origin of disease, and the utterly unwarranted assumption that because a man has surplus wealth he has been guilty of sin. Should the Christians of our time advance the ingenious theory that Jesus knew the truth on all these subjects, but that he deliberately concealed it and masqueraded as an uninformed man of the first century? That theory, if it were true, would reflect seriously on Jesus' intellectual honesty and practical kindness. Had he known that there are no evil spirits and that epilepsy is caused by something other than demons, he could have rendered an immeasurable service to the world by saying so. Those words of his would have saved humanity centuries of ignorance and suffering. Should the Christians of our time make the statement that if Jesus was mistaken in some of his views he is, therefore, unreliable in everything he said? Should they assert that we must prove him right in all his beliefs if we are to prove him right in any of them? We never dream of applying such twisted logic to ourselves. We never claim that a surgeon must know everything about

music if he is to be trusted to remove a diseased appendix. Why not recognize that Jesus, like every great man, could be uninformed on some subjects but wonderfully wise on others? Why not abandon the futile effort to prove that all his statements were correct, and give ourselves with fresh intelligence to the task of following his teaching at those points at which experience has shown it can be followed by a later and a wiser age?

V

What, now, are those points? What is the second strand in Jesus' thinking? During recent years many scholars have tried to locate the ideas and ideals which Jesus advanced and which have, in the centuries since, proved permanently true and valuable. Naturally the conclusions reached by different men differ in detail and in phrasing. But on several points there seems almost unanimous agreement. There were at least three great ideas which Jesus gave the world, ideas which have since gained expression through numberless individuals and institutions, and which have altered profoundly not only the thought but also the life of our Western world.

To begin with, Jesus insisted that every human

being, no matter how insignificant, is a child of God and therefore of priceless value. Other religious teachers, living in other parts of the world or even living before Jesus' day, may have reached a similar conclusion and may have advanced a similar doctrine. But as far as our Western civilization is concerned the major source of this now familiar belief is Jesus. How his teaching on this point has altered our world! This belief, expressing itself in many lives and through many institutions, gradually overthrew the heartlessness of the ancient world, obliterated customs that degraded human beings, and called into existence new attitudes and institutions which have proved of immeasurable social value. Who can compute the greatness of the service Jesus rendered when he gave humanity this impetus toward respect for people and faith in people, even people who seem insignificant and unpromising?

Jesus' second great teaching followed naturally from the first. Because every human being is of priceless value we owe everyone we meet friendliness and active help. It makes no difference who this other person is. He may belong to another race or another creed. He may even be our own worst enemy. But whoever he is, we must show toward him the spirit

of friendship and helpfulness. Here again there may have been other teachers who, at Jesus' time or even before it, grasped this great principle. But here again, as far as our Western world is concerned, the major source of the new attitude has been Jesus. No one can estimate how deeply this new teaching has altered our civilization. It put before men the new ideal of active kindness, active kindness toward everyone. It assured them that the greatest individual in any group or community is not the one who gains the most wealth or the most power but the one who renders the greatest service. It insisted that a kindness shown to a person in need, even to a little child, is a service rendered to the Lord of all life. The far-flung philanthropies of our time are the organized expression of the idea and the ideal Jesus gave the world. In the final analysis it is to him and his teaching that we owe them all.

Jesus' other major conviction is closely related to the first two. Just as we human beings value each other and help each other, so God values and helps us all. It makes no difference who we are, what our need is, or what our previous moral record has been. Simply because we are people, God's children, God loves us and constantly tries to help us. *"Everyone*

that asketh receiveth, *everyone* that seeketh findeth, to *everyone* that knocketh it shall be opened." [9] These words have had a profound and an abiding influence, first on our Western world, and now on human beings everywhere. They gradually swept away the ancient notion that God has racial favorites, and they slowly obliterated the once-universal belief that men must capture God's attention and purchase His help by huge gifts and obsequious ceremonies. Now they are slowly undermining the superstition that God is partial toward the members of a certain church or the adherents of a certain creed. The belief Jesus held, and the belief which men everywhere are beginning to hold, asserts that when a man—any man—needs and wants God's help all he has to do is reach out and take it. "Ask and ye *shall* receive, seek and ye *shall* find, knock and it *shall* be opened unto you." [10]

Around these new convictions Jesus developed his new way of living, a way characterized by respect for every human being, friendship and kindness toward every human being, and unfaltering trust in the friendly, helpful God who is over us all. This new way of living was Jesus' supreme contribution to

[9] Matthew vii. 8.

[10] *Ibid.*, vii. 7.

the life of the world. He followed this way himself, and to it he summoned all those who were willing to listen to him. Human stupidity and cruelty soon brought Jesus to an untimely and inexpressibly tragic end, but the ideas and ideals Jesus advanced and the way of life in which they found expression persisted. They persisted in spite of the heavy trappings of theological theory and ecclesiastical organization in which Jesus' well-meaning followers soon enswathed them. Through succeeding centuries these ideas and ideals and this way of living have emerged in the lives of more and more people. When we meet an individual who is dominated by them we soon realize that we are in the presence of a person who, in the telling phrase of the New Testament, "has been with Jesus." Here is the true, the original Christianity. It knows nothing of the elaborate ceremonials, the complicated creeds, the impressive ecclesiastical organizations which later generations devised. It is the simple religion which the scholarship of our day has finally uncovered in all its splendor, and to which the men of our time are turning with greater and greater eagerness. It is the hope of the future, this religion of Jesus himself.

VI

All this makes plain the precise message which modern Christianity has for the modern world. It is a message which is unaffected by many modern doubts for the reason that it has abandoned those claims on which modern skepticism could make and was making a fatal attack. It is a message which has meaning for and appeal to the generation so soon to succeed ours, a generation trained in new ways of thinking and enlightened by the new knowledge of our time. What, now, is this message?

The Biblical picture of Adam and Eve, deliberately disobeying God in the Garden of Eden and thus bringing the sentence of death on all their descendants, has faded from the modern mind. John Bunyan's later picture of Christian, making his solitary and painful way from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City and losing the burden of his sin at the foot of the cross, has also faded. An interpretation of the Christian gospel adjusted to either of these ancient views of life and history is now pitifully unconvincing. In place of these two former pictures the discerning men of our time now see something new. They see the human race emerging from the animal world, and trying desperately to throw aside

the cruelty and the selfishness, the lust and the fear inherited from the distant past. They see millions of individuals trying to discover the path to happiness, the path to friendship and the joy which friendship brings, and the path to unfaltering courage and hope. In the midst of this vast throng a supreme figure stands—Jesus Christ. He tells us how to find happiness, how to find friendship, how to find courage. Along his way of life we can, as he did, discover them all. Through the centuries men have knocked at many doors, hoping to find guidance for the dark road of life. Why not turn at last to the door where Jesus waits to help us all?

> Behold, we stand at many doors and knock,
> From house to house we pass in the cold night,
> But hear not any creaking of the lock,
> And through no crevice see the welcome light.
> Silent those palaces for evermore . . .
> Only one house remains untried, where stands
> The friend who waits our knocking at his door,
> Upon the latch his scarred and eager hands.[11]

[11] Edward Shillito in *The Master of Men*, p. 40.

CHAPTER X

SOME ANTI-CHRISTIAN FORCES IN MODERN LIFE

I

DOROTHY PARKER has recently published a brilliant poem which describes the change that overtakes most idealists and reformers as they grow old. The poem is entitled "The Veteran."

> When I was young and bold and strong
> O right was right, and wrong was wrong!
> My plume on high, my flag unfurled,
> I rode away to right the world.
> "Come out, you dogs, and fight!" said I,
> And wept I had but once to die.
>
> Now I am old, and good and bad
> Are woven in a crazy plaid.
> I sit and say, "The world is so,
> And he is wise who lets it go.
> A battle lost, a battle won—
> The difference is small, my son."
> Inertia rides and riddles me,
> And calls itself Philosophy.[1]

[1] Dorothy Parker, *Enough Rope*, p. 65.

Christianity has passed through this change during its long history. At first its convictions about right and wrong were sharp and sure, and its foes were clearly recognized and bitterly hated. The difference between a first-century pagan and a first-century Christian was plain to everyone. The New Testament throbs with this sense of separateness and with the passion to convert others from the error of their ways. Jesus denounced his critics and his enemies in no uncertain terms, and assured his followers that if they hoped to enter the coming kingdom they must have a type of righteousness higher than that of the people about them, even the best people. Paul told his converts in Ephesus that they were contending against the unseen and sinister powers of Satan himself, and begged the members of the church in Rome never to conform to this world no matter how insistent the pressure and how plausible the excuses. In the Book of Revelation this note of hostility toward the non-Christian group reaches a shrill climax. The author prophesies that the immediate future will witness the overthrow of Rome, the triumph of Christ and his followers, and the punishment of Satan and his hosts in a lake of fire. Here we see the separateness, the assurance, and the belligerency of the new

faith. Right was right, and wrong was wrong, and there was no question which of the two Christianity represented.

This mood and this conviction have now passed. We can no longer draw a vivid contrast between a jet-black world and a snow-white Church. Christian ideas and ideals have penetrated, to some extent at least, the life of society, and have modified deeply its attitudes and its institutions. Meantime wholly new problems have arisen, problems to which Christian leaders can no longer give a quick and a convincing solution. What is the concrete Christian program in a particular modern situation? Often we cannot say. Most curious of all, many Christians claim to have found ways by which the precepts of Christ and the shrewd wisdom of the world can be reconciled, methods by which a man can serve both God and Mammon after all. Two centuries ago Samuel Pepys wrote these quaint sentences in his diary: "This morning heard a good sermon by Mr. Gifford on the text, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven.' A very excellent and persuasive, a good and moral sermon. Like a wise man Mr. Gifford showed that righteousness is a surer way of becoming rich than sin." [2]

[2] Quoted in *Jesus and the American Mind* (H. E. Luccock), p. 200.

What a comforting gospel! Jesus' teachings were, after all, a vindication of current business methods and current financial aspirations!

The result of all these developments is a strange confusion within the Christianity of our time. Ask the average church-member what the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is, and he will hesitate some time before making a reply. Ask him what the anti-Christian forces in modern life are, and he will have even greater difficulty answering. Dean Inge says that the Church of to-day is made up of "little, harmless people, with everybody wanting a good time." That statement is undoubtedly an exaggeration, but there is certainly a marked difference between a first-century Christian defying Roman traditions, and a twentieth-century Christian determined at any cost not to be different from his neighbors.

II

What, now, are the points at which our current American life contradicts most sharply the ideas and ideals of Jesus? As we attempt to answer that question there are several facts we might well remember. It is the disregard of these facts which leads some religious leaders to make unfair indictments of modern civilization, and then suggest wholly fanciful

schemes for Christianizing the social and economic order. The utterances of such men are not an asset to the cause of Christ. As a matter of fact these utterances serve only to discredit that cause, and lead intelligent and soberminded reformers to the conclusion that the improvement of social conditions must be made under secular rather than religious leadership.

To begin with, we must remember that there are certain points in the long battle line at which Christianity has won and is still winning a significant victory. To imply that Jesus' principles have been universally rejected, or that the cause of Christ is everywhere in retreat, is to misrepresent lamentably the actual situation. Consider one of the most obvious victories of the Christian ideal. Jesus taught that every human being, no matter how insignificant or unpromising, is of infinite value. How profoundly that belief changed and is still changing social ideals and institutions! When Jesus first advanced the idea human life was appallingly cheap. Infanticide was common; slavery was a universally accepted institution; human beings were slaughtered for purposes of public entertainment; and at the bottom of society was a mass of ignorant, unemployed, hungry human

creatures whose only ways of keeping alive were to beg or to steal. What changes Jesus' new conviction and the institutions it created brought into that heartless world! What changes it is still bringing into modern communities! In spite of all our failures we have to-day a dozen welfare agencies which minister to the very groups the ancient world scorned, a hundred laws designed to protect the poor and the underprivileged, and a democratic system of government coupled with a system of free public education which provides for every child in the community advantages which the sons of kings could not secure a century ago. Meantime modern Christianity raises its vehement protest against every institution in modern society which destroys or degrades human personality. It protests against child labor, against every type of industrial oppression, against the neglect and the abuse of the aged, and against the ghastly slaughter of human beings in war. At all these points the Christian ideal has won and is still winning a significant victory. When we enumerate the defeats of Christianity let us, in fairness to the facts, mention its triumphs too.

We must also remember, when we analyze and criticize modern American Christianity, that there are

two distinct groups within our population. One is admittedly a disappointment. The other is a manifest credit to the Christian tradition. Curiously enough many pessimists overlook this second group entirely. They speak as if America were made up entirely of those ignorant, uncultivated, selfish yokels whom a few cynics dearly love to berate. They entirely forget there are Americans of another type, Americans who reveal a clear understanding of and a splendid loyalty to the spirit of Jesus. Consider a picture recently drawn by one of our contemporary American essayists. "Out on the road of gasoline stations, water-cans, hot dogs, ukuleles, kewpie dolls, and chocolate almond bars that is now the highway of our nation, the stream of Sunday automobiles flows by. Suddenly a slow car holds up the line. Sirens blare, horns toot, brakes bite savagely. What's the matter with that guy? Doesn't he know if we don't reach Jamesport till two-thirty we can't reach Creston till three? And that means we can't pull into Smithville till after four? Not that there is anything special at Smithville, but we do want to get there sometime. Now the caravan starts again. One car honks past the slow one, then another, then another. Over the hill they all go—lunch boxes tossed overboard,

and the back seat filled with goldenrod. America revisited!" [3]

But is it America revisited? It is part of America revisited, and the less creditable part. When we stare bitterly at this tawdry corner of the contemporary scene let us, in justice to the facts, remember there are other and finer corners at which we might look if we had the patience and the inclination to do so. We might look at our better homes, our nobler churches, our many welfare institutions, our business and industrial organizations which are honestly trying to put the Christian principles of considerateness, generosity, and loyalty to the common welfare into practice. We certainly might look at the thousands of individuals who, day after day, are revealing the spirit of Jesus. This too is America, just as truly as the raucous seaside resort and the noisy automobile parade are America. In our eagerness to point out the black sheep in the American flock let us never forget there are numerous white ones which might be displayed.

One other fact which critics should bear in mind is this. When we attempt to pass judgment on modern society it is dangerously easy to lose our temper and

[3] See *Jesus and the American Mind*, p. 104.

our sense of proportion, and announce with deep emotion that the particular situation which annoys us personally is "the major menace of America." We may even wax eloquent and prophesy that unless this evil is corrected, corrected speedily, and corrected in accordance with our private formula that the nation as a whole is doomed. When the critic's book, essay, or sermon is subjected to a careful and searching analysis, however, the fact appears that the critic was giving a highly emotional and therefore intensely satisfying expression to his personal grievances, private grudges, and secret wish-fancies. What he said openly and explosively was not so much a revelation of the social situation as a disclosure of his own inner bitterness. An employer, dismayed by a declining demand for his goods and the rising cost of producing them, declares bitterly that the major peril of the United States to-day is the excessive demands made by the working classes. A parlor radical, secretly coveting his neighbor's limousine, states oracularly that the real menace to modern happiness is the man with a large cash surplus. A minister, bewildered by the large Sunday attendance at the Country Club and the pitifully small attendance at his own morning service, announces a sermon on "Sabbath observance,

the cure of America's ills." A college professor with a vigorous antireligious complex tells an astonished audience that "orthodox religion is the greatest existing menace to human welfare." What is the ultimate source of all these outbursts? Anyone who knows the workings of the human spirit understands that in such cases we are not dealing with careful and dispassionate analyses of contemporary life. We are dealing with the private grudges and the personal biases of a group of individuals who, without asking whether their own sight is clear, are volunteering to remove motes from others' eyes. There is a passage in one of the writings of Thomas B. Reed which many contemporary critics and reformers would do well to ponder deeply. "Whenever I walk down the fine streets in New York and gaze at the handsome dwellings my gorge always rises. But I know what that feeling really is. It is good, old-fashioned, honest envy—envy of the rich. When some other gentlemen have the same feeling they call it economic wisdom." [4]

III

Granting all this, what can we still say about the anti-Christian forces in modern society? Instead of

[4] See H. E. Fosdick, *Twelve Tests of Character*, p. 171.

following the usual method and describing in detail many individual situations which defy the ideas and ideals of Jesus, let us discuss three major conflicts which are now going on under the surface of modern life. In each we see the struggle between an ideal which Jesus gave the world and an ideal which has come down to us from the animal realm of long ago. These three conflicts are not, of course, the only ones which might be mentioned. We are here omitting, for example, a discussion of the conflict between Jesus' religious views and the contrasting beliefs advanced by many of our contemporaries.

The first underlying conflict to-day is the conflict between the primitive ideal of limitless private acquisition, and the Christian ideal of deliberate and continuous sharing. The primitive ideal grows, of course, out of an instinct which we have inherited from our far-off animal ancestors. A squirrel will seize all the nuts he can find and laboriously tug them to his secret treasure chamber in a tree. A dog will snatch all the bones in sight, gnaw them for a time, and then bury them carefully for private enjoyment later. This tendency to grab and keep was a necessity in the primeval world. Without it the animals would have perished speedily in their struggle with the immense

powers of cold, hunger, and death arrayed against them. In the case of the higher animals this instinct was somewhat modified by the impulse to share with a limited group, the helpless offspring huddled in a nest or a cave. But to all of us to-day, the late descendants of these far-off animal forbears, the ancient jungle impulse has been handed down in alarming potency. Anyone who questions its strength in human beings to-day need only watch the actions of any small child who is given the run of the nursery and free access to his brother's supply of toys.

When an adult with this deeply rooted acquisitive instinct comes face to face with the modern world, what does he find? He discovers that an immense array of fascinating articles has been spread before him, that an army of individuals called salesmen and advertisers make it their business to stimulate his desire for those articles, and that if he succeeds in gaining possession of any or all of them the community will not only protect his control over them but often grade the recognition and respect it gives him by reference to the number of those articles which he possesses. Statisticians tell us that in the United States some three hundred and sixty-five thousand different things are now being manufactured,

and that some thirty-two thousand of them are being ingeniously and insistently forced on the buying public by a sales force and an advertising army unparalleled in history. The principle of protecting property rights—whatever their nature—is, as we all know, one of the basic elements in our legal and political systems, and the respect and the deference shown to those who control vast amounts of property are too obvious for comment. The result of this new situation is that the impulse to grab and keep is now stimulated as never before. Around the ideal of limitless private acquisition the plans and hopes of many thousands of our contemporaries are built. Their aim, frankly, is to make money, the more of it the better. With this money they plan to secure for themselves and their children the fine things money can buy, fine things which will be theirs permanently, and fine things for which their neighbors will openly admire and secretly envy them. Press below the surface of these lives and you find there the animal impulse to grab and keep, keep for one's self and for one's young.

Over against this ideal is the antithetical Christian ideal—the ideal of deliberate and continuous sharing. There is no possible way by which the two can be

reconciled. Jesus says that we are not here to grab and keep, even grab and keep for our children. We are here to earn and then share, share with all those about us. This Christian ideal calls forth attitudes and ambitions which are diametrically opposed to those created by the animal ideal. When a young man chooses a life work the Christian ideal impels him to ask such questions as these. "Where is help most needed in the community of to-day? Where can I render the greatest service to the people about me? Considering my abilities and my opportunities what is the career in which I can make myself most useful to my generation?" If, in the pursuit of his life work, that young man eventually finds himself—as most young men to-day do find themselves—in a business venture, the Christian ideal forces him to ask such questions as these. "What are the highest wages I can pay the men and women in my employ? What is the lowest price I can ask from the public for the goods I produce? How can I most effectively share with others the opportunity and the power this enterprise puts into my hands?" If, in the course of time, this man finds surplus wealth in his possession, the Christian ideal leads him to make these inquiries. "Considering the needs of the community as a whole

how can I use this money most effectively? In what form can it best be passed on, not to my children alone but to all the people about me? What agencies and what individuals will be most able, in the years ahead, to make this wealth a blessing and not a curse to humanity?" Between this Christian ideal and the selfish ideal of the animal world there is a permanent and an irreconcilable conflict. As the years pass, each individual lives in accordance with one standard or the other. We take our place, silently but inevitably, on one side or the other of this unseen battle line.

IV

The next conflict we note in modern life is the conflict between the animal ideal of persistent and determined self-consideration, and the Christian ideal of deliberate and sustained service of others. Obviously this conflict is closely related to the one we were just discussing. It would be possible to study them together and show that the self-centered life is a natural and almost inevitable development of the life dominated by the acquisitive impulse. But in practice we find that a great many people who deliberately reject the ideal of grabbing and keeping often lapse by imperceptible degrees into the habit of

persistent and determined self-consideration. They are, of course, as thoroughly un-Christian in their way of living as their grasping and penurious neighbors.

Here again we can trace the origin of the anti-Christian ideal back to the primeval world. The animals in a menagerie, particularly the animals of the lower types, give painfully few evidences of considerateness or deliberate self-sacrifice. The jungle world was organized on an entirely different basis. There the rule was familiar and relentless—"Everyone for himself, and death take the hindmost." Curiously enough, the conditions of life in a modern community, particularly in a large city, accentuate this ancient impulse toward self-reference and self-absorption. Someone has recently said that the most selfish way of living ever made possible for human beings is the way not only offered but recommended by the high-grade apartment houses of our time. The more we analyze that remark the truer it seems. In Jesus' day the rich and well-to-do were compelled to remain in close contact with those who produced their food, their clothing, and their amusements. How different the situation to-day! The comfortable families in a modern apartment never gain even a glimpse of the workers on farms and in factories whose exhausting

labor makes possible the enjoyments of the urban rich. In Jesus' day the favored classes could not escape the appeals of the suffering and the destitute. Lazarus lay at the very gate of Dives' house, and whenever Dives and his guests went in or out they could not miss the appeal of his outstretched hand and his tired eyes. How different the situation of the rich to-day! The first thing we notice when we approach a modern apartment is a police officer disguised as an attendant and stationed just inside the revolving door to make sure that no beggars, pedlars, or solicitors invade the premises. In Jesus' day a man who was born in Nazareth or Capernaum usually stayed there all his days, and gradually came to feel at least some interest in and responsibility toward the people about him. The group life laid its claims upon him, and he could scarcely avoid carrying at least some of a neighbor's and a citizen's burdens. How different our situation to-day! Our communities, particularly our great cities, are filled with a restless army of migrants who are here this year and somewhere else next, and who feel not the slightest sense of responsibility to any community or any group of neighbors. Each family fills its own tiny world, and existence for these people finally resolves itself into

the task of watching those few lives, tending those few interests, and keeping those few sets of feelings perfectly happy.

Over against this familiar modern ideal is the utterly different ideal of Jesus. Jesus insisted that the road of determined and persistent self-consideration is the road to death, and that the only people who find enduring happiness are those who spend their days thinking of and giving help to others. "He that saveth his life shall lose it: he that loseth his life for my sake and the gospel's shall find it." [5] Whatever the original meaning of those words, their meaning to-day is crystal clear. A man whose thoughts are centered on himself and whose major effort is to minister to his own comfort and happiness is fated to lose the very satisfactions he craves. A man whose interests are outside himself and whose aim is to enrich life for wider and wider groups discovers in this deliberate self-renunciation the joy we might think he had permanently forfeited. Between these two ideals and the inner misery or inner happiness to which they inevitably lead each of us must choose. Underneath one flag or the other we must take our stand. There is no possible way by which we can be

[5] Mark viii. 35.

habitually self-absorbed and habitually unselfish at the same time.

V

The other conflict we mention is the one between the animal ideal of intolerant dominion over others and the Christian ideal of friendly coöperation with others. Here again it is easy to trace the animal ideal of conquest by brute force, and control by superior strength and cunning, from its starting point in the jungle down through the centuries of subhuman and human evolution to its many manifestations in society to-day. We find in the modern world many homes in which this ideal of ruthless domination over subordinates persists. A college student once exclaimed bitterly, "My father's idea of a discussion with the members of our family is a passionate expression of his own opinion." What a picture of a home in which the old law of the rule of the strongest still held sway! It is an open secret that many business and industrial organizations are still dominated by this autocratic ideal. The editor of one of our most influential business journals wrote four years ago, "I can understand why modern business men admire Mussolini and his methods. They are essentially those

of successful business to-day. Deeds and not words. Executive action and not conferences. A bit of the Jesuitical perhaps, but the end justifies the means. Social control of the factory or the business? Anathema!" [6] There again we see the pre-Christian ideal with its anti-Christian consequences. When this dream of intolerant and ruthless control over others spreads out from homes and business organizations to the realm of international relationships, what happens? One nation, persuaded of its own divinely ordained superiority and right to rule, sets out to conquer the world. Then other nations, driven to thoroughly justified acts of self-defense, resist. Then all the nations are gradually embroiled in a titanic conflict. This type of swollen nationalism is one of the greatest enemies Christianity faces to-day. If there ever should be another world war, this animal ideal of dominion by force will probably be responsible for it.

Over against this ideal, with its grim source and its ghastly consequences, stands the new ideal which Jesus gave the world—the ideal of tolerant and friendly coöperation. Obviously Christians have not always accepted Jesus' ideal, and even when they have accepted it by word they have often failed to

[6] See *Jesus and the American Mind*, p. 135.

live up to it in practice. But the intent of the Christian ideal, and the goal toward which numberless followers of Jesus are now trying to turn the thoughts of individuals and nations, are plain. Christianity at its best, the true Christianity, pleads for open-mindedness, for humility, for the teachable spirit, for the coöperative attitude. Jesus reminds us that unless we become as little children we shall never enter the new and the happier kingdom. He holds before us the vision of a friendly society—homes in which the rights of every member of the family are considered, business organizations in which every individual connected with the enterprise has the chance to state his case and receive a fair hearing, and a world of cooperative races and nations in which the jungle ideal of conquest has been supplanted by the Christian ideal of mutual helpfulness and lasting peace. These two views of life and attitudes toward life stand in permanent and irreconcilable conflict. Each individual, each group, and each generation must choose between them.

VI

When we study the concrete situations in the modern world in which Jesus' ideas and ideals are most

flagrantly denied—as, for example, the abuse of women and children in industry, or the wholesale slaughter of young men in war—we invariably discover beneath these situations one or more of these anti-Christian ideals. When we find reformers, whether they call themselves Christians or not, protesting against these situations and seeking to change them, we discover in their efforts a direct or indirect expression of the ideals of Jesus. How these Christian ideals—the ideal of generosity, the ideal of unselfish service, the ideal of friendly coöperation—can best be attained amid the new and bewilderingly complex conditions of modern life, the specialists in such fields as domestic relations, business and industrial reorganization, and international contacts must tell us. The average parish minister is no more qualified to speak authoritatively on these detailed problems than the average employment manager is qualified to speak authoritatively on the interpretation of an obscure reference in one of Paul's epistles. Each man must recognize his own limitations, rejoice in the other man's ampler knowledge of a certain field, and show a decent respect for the other man's intelligence and sincerity. But before us all, whatever our field of study and endeavor, stand the ulti-

mate ideals which Jesus gave mankind. Before the generations they rise in distant yet ever-alluring splendor. To them we and our children must be true. In their light, still undimmed and apparently fadeless, we must strive to rebuild the institutions of our own day.

CHAPTER XI

CAN MODERN CHRISTIANITY TRANSFORM CHARACTER?

I

SOME years ago one of the welfare agencies in Massachusetts was asked to handle a peculiarly difficult case of juvenile delinquency. A twelve-year-old boy named Ricardo, who had given the Boston police continued difficulty, was placed in a farmer's home in an isolated region, and there given careful supervision by both the farmer and a social worker. It was hoped that this radical change in the boy's surroundings would enable him to throw off his evil habits and develop normally. But presently Ricardo began to steal again, and one day he vanished completely. It was found he had walked to the store in a distant village, purchased bread and cake and doughnuts, and started for Boston. He was caught by the police as he trudged through the next town and hurriedly transferred to a correctional institution. There he continued to give trouble. During the next six years

he ran away whenever an opportunity presented itself. One day when he was eighteen he succeeded in getting as far as Connecticut, but the police in Hartford captured him and returned him promptly to a Massachusetts jail. The next morning when an officer went to summon Ricardo he was found preparing to hang himself. He had torn his suit into narrow strips and knotted them into a crude rope. Had the officer arrived an hour later the boy would undoubtedly have been dead. A delinquent, a thief, a runaway, and now an attempted suicide—all when Ricardo was eighteen. Could a character like that ever be transformed?

When the preachers of the past faced this problem of character transformation they employed a simple but a dramatic technique. It appears clearly in the Book of Revelation, in medieval treatises on heaven and hell, and in the sermons preached by the revivalists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The authors of all these documents maintained that the Devil is the source of the evil impulses which rise in human hearts and which lead to suffering and disaster. It was, these men said, the Devil who enticed Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. It was the Devil who entered Judas

and persuaded him to betray Jesus. It is the Devil who in these later years seeks to entice all human beings into sin. Assisted by a host of unseen evil spirits Satan "goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." This familiar theory was vividly expressed in a hymn written by George Heath and published in 1781.

> My soul, be on thy guard,
> Ten thousand foes arise!
> The hosts of sin are pressing hard
> To draw thee from the skies.

Suppose a man resists the Devil, and stubbornly refuses to yield to temptation. What then? After death, according to this theory, he will be rewarded by an eternity of bliss. Suppose he yields to Satan, does the wicked things so insistently suggested to him. After death he will be punished by eternal torment in hell. Thus, according to the old technique, the major incentive toward virtue was the hope of future reward and the fear of future punishment. The chief method of precipitating improvements in a human life was to hold before the sinner pictures of heaven and hell, and bid him choose. You and I, living in a world that has outgrown these naïve beliefs, little realize how lurid some of these pictures

were and what immense effect they had on human beings who were less skeptical, less sophisticated, and far more suggestible than we are. In 1758 Jonathan Edwards addressed these gruesome words to his congregation: "Here all judges have a mixture of mercy, but there the wrath of God will be poured without measure on the wicked. Imagine yourself cast into a fiery oven, and that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal fire, and yet all the while full of quick sense. What horror you would feel at the entrance to such a furnace! O then how would your heart sink if you knew that after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer an end than ever it was! But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than these words represent." Is it surprising that, after an hour of such preaching, strong men were found gripping the posts of the building in an agony of fear? If Jonathan Edwards had been asked to deal with a boy like Ricardo he would have employed a simple but a dramatic method. He would have described heaven and described hell, and then told Ricardo to take his choice. The boy's instinctive hope and instinctive fear would have done the rest.

To-day, as every intelligent person realizes, an entirely new situation has arisen. Modern knowledge has driven out the immemorial belief in a Devil, in his host of evil spirits, and in the hell where all the demons live. An occasional revivalist may preach about Satan and may attempt lurid descriptions of eternal punishment, but the general public no longer takes these clerical pronouncements seriously. The medieval convictions and attitudes which the revivalist is attempting to reintroduce into the modern world are obviously out of place. Meantime the new method of Bible study has altered completely the old conception of celestial rewards. Intelligent Christians now realize that the vivid descriptions of the New Jerusalem found in the Book of Revelation belong in the category of imaginative poetry rather than that of actual fact. To interpret them literally is as foolish as to interpret literally the corresponding descriptions of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Thus the picture of the rewards of heaven, like the picture of the terrors of hell, has faded from the modern view. It has faded not only for those who have made a careful and a detailed study of religion, but also for an ever-increasing number of common people. These men and women, knowing

nothing about the history of the doctrine of post-mortem rewards and punishments, merely smile when heaven and hell are mentioned. Both localities, intensely real to their great-grandparents, have vanished from their world. The result of this change is that appeals to virtue, based on the hope of future reward and the fear of future punishment, are wholly ineffective to-day. If a modern social worker attempted to influence Ricardo's habits by describing to him heaven and hell, Ricardo would merely shrug his shoulders. A new technique of character reconstruction must be devised. Have we any idea what it is? Or are we helpless as we face this perennial problem of transforming human habits and desires?

II

Fortunately the last few decades have seen a marked increase in our understanding of the forces that work within human hearts and the influences that determine human actions. It is safe to say that we have learned more about these matters during the last century than our predecessors did during the preceding ten. We now realize that the dangerous impulses which emerge with greater or less frequency in us all have their origin not in a mythical Devil

but in one or more of several fairly obvious sources.

The first is the strangely mixed inheritance we have drawn from our distant forbears in the animal realm. If a man wishes to understand his temptations and conduct problems the best thing for him to do is not to read a medieval treatise on demons but to watch the animals in the local menagerie. There, on the other side of the bars, he can see his own impulses and desires in larger proportions and less restrained form. Each of those animals has a fighting impulse—a tendency to snarl, scratch, and bite when the slightest provocation arises. Human beings have that impulse too, but on the human level it emerges as anger, bad temper, or habitual ugliness. Each of the animals shows jealousy, selfishness, and physical appetites that are almost if not quite uncontrollable. We have these impulses too, and again and again they work disaster for us. Where do the sins of greed and murder, lust and hatred have their origin? In a group of impulses essential to animals fighting for survival in a jungle, but now far too powerful in our new human world.

The next source of the evil tendencies in human hearts is the influence of a vicious environment. The

finer qualities in the personality are starved and thwarted, and the dangerous qualities are brought to the fore. Some years ago one of the New York weeklies published this bitter paragraph. "The nine-days' wonder of our city this spring has been the Bob-Haired Bandit, a young girl who held up a series of small stores in Brooklyn and in each case escaped with the contents of the till. She was eventually captured, of course, and proved to be a girl of only twenty named Cecilia Cooney. What was the environment out of which she had come? Her father was a drunkard, and her mother an indifferent creature who had left her brood of children either to starve or beg food from the neighbors. Cecilia was the youngest of the eight. By the time she was fifteen she was working in a factory, and she had begun the desperate practice of spending her evenings with disreputable men picked up on the street. Her twenty years have been years of cold and hunger, years of life in cellars, and years of being kept alive by charity. Is it any wonder that out of this environment came the determination to pursue a life of crime? The wonder is that any child brought up as this girl was stays honest. Cecilia Cooney is the product of our city—its neglect and its carelessness, its indifference and its undercurrents of human misery.

Her crimes are upon our heads." [1] We would not expect a hyacinth bulb to reveal its full possibilities of fragrance and purple splendor if we kept it in a closet and surrounded it with sand. Why should we expect human beings to develop normally and reveal their hidden splendors if we compel them to stay year after year in the horror of the slums?

The other source of human wickedness is less obvious. If you study people carefully you will discover that their evil conduct is often due to secret strains and tensions within the self. The outbursts of tired children and the tragic exploits of individuals who are subnormal mentally or unbalanced emotionally are familiar examples. Similar in origin are the strange and sometimes dangerous actions of normal people who are suffering from secret fear, secret grief, or secret loneliness. This, curiously enough, was the case with poor Ricardo. His father had deserted the family soon after Ricardo was born, and the only parent on whom Ricardo could lavish his affection and loyalty was his mother. Then she too failed him. When he was living on the farm a hundred miles from home she wrote him once, only once. Then she vanished from his little world. Twelve-year-old

[1] See *The New Republic*, May 21, 1924.

Ricardo endured his loneliness and anxiety as long as he could, and then determined to make his way to Boston and find his mother. That was the motive behind his thefts and his escape from the farmhouse. That was the desire hidden in his mind as he trudged wearily toward Boston. For the next six years he heard nothing from his mother, and for the next six years he continued to run away—always trying to find her. When he was eighteen he learned she might possibly be with friends in Connecticut, or that they might know of her whereabouts. Promptly he started for Connecticut, only to be caught by the police and sent back to Massachusetts. When, early the next morning, he resolved to hang himself it was loneliness, the loneliness of a boy deserted by both his parents, that drove him to the act. His delinquency was not the work of the Devil. It was the symptom of a broken heart.

III

On the basis of this new understanding of the forces that make for evil the social workers of our day are perfecting a new technique of character reconstruction. It bears no resemblance whatever to the ancient method—an appeal to hope of heaven

and fear of hell. Anyone who wants to study this new technique can do so by reading the case records published by juvenile courts, correctional schools, and child welfare agencies. Dr. Miriam Van Waters, referee in the Juvenile Court in Los Angeles, sums up her years of experience in dealing with problem children by saying there are four stages in the process of transforming an evil—that is, an unadjusted—personality.[2] First: both the social worker and the individual who is to be helped must understand the problem before them. Ricardo must see why he runs away, and what it is he is trying to find. Second: new loyalties and ideals must be thrust into the life of the individual who is to be changed. If Ricardo cannot locate his mother another individual must be provided around whom his affection and trust can twine. Third: a new side of the child's personality must be developed. Ricardo must be given new interests and new ways of expressing himself. Finally: a new set of social relationships must be provided for the person who is making the new start. Ricardo must be transferred to a new environment, one in which new personalities and new duties

[2] For the references in this section see Miriam Van Waters, *Youth in Conflict,* Chapter VIII.

will call forth his latent best. How successful this new technique of character transformation is we can judge by studying the case records now available. Dr. Van Waters gives this example:

"Elizabeth was a girl of fourteen with an intelligence-quotient of 108. Her father was a migratory cook, ranchman, and loafer. Her mother was a waitress and chambermaid. When Elizabeth was only six her parents were divorced, and Elizabeth went with her mother to a succession of lumber-towns where her mother worked. Soon she became unruly, and when she was eight her mother placed her in a correctional school maintained by the State. Then her mother vanished, and has not been heard from since. For the next four years Elizabeth lived in that school, while her father moved to another State and there married a woman who was on parole from an insane asylum. Eventually the authorities in Elizabeth's school located him and promptly returned his daughter to him. For the next two years Elizabeth lived in his home with an aged grandmother and an insane stepmother as her companions. Naturally she became unruly again, was delinquent with boys, and finally developed fantastic ideas. One day she would fancy herself the worst of sinners, and

the next would claim proudly she was the wife of a famous moving-picture hero. She was brought into court, placed in a school for problem-girls, and then expelled for bad conduct. Presently she reverted to the personal habits of a child of three, refused to bathe, and in matters of hygiene and cleanliness made herself a nuisance to everyone. Could anything be done to transform such an individual?

"She was finally placed in a detention home, and there given an understanding of her own problem and the desire to solve it. Three months later her father's sister appeared unexpectedly and insisted on taking Elizabeth home with her. The aunt was a kindly, maternal person who refused to admit that her niece was abnormal. She insisted that Elizabeth had never had a fair chance, and she now expressed her eagerness to offer her one. Elizabeth was given to the aunt and soon developed a deep affection for her. During the year Elizabeth has spent in her new home she has shown no signs whatever of her former delinquency or her lapses in personal cleanliness."

A century ago work of this kind was not done anywhere. It was not done for the reason that no one knew how to do it. To-day work of this kind is being done, quietly and unobserved, in hundreds of cor-

rectional institutions and child-welfare agencies. Here is the new technique of character transformation. Here is the new type of conversion. Its motivating powers are not hope of heaven and fear of hell. Rather they are insight, transference, the development of new sides of the personality, and the substitution of new social relationships for old.

IV

This situation offers the emerging Christianity of to-morrow an unexpected and a superb opportunity. The experience of recent years has shown discriminating observers that the old-fashioned revival service is, as far as our more intelligent communities are concerned, a thing of the past. The exhortations and appeals that were able to change character a few decades ago now prove, in most cases, wholly impotent. But the new knowledge of human nature and the new technique of character transformation offer the religious leaders of to-day entirely new resources. Social workers and students of applied psychology can tell these leaders how human beings are changed, what forces are most efficacious in precipitating changes, and how those forces can be most wisely and skillfully applied. In the course of time

this new knowledge will undoubtedly be employed by progressive religious leaders everywhere. We shall not only hear a new type of preaching but see a new type of evangelistic endeavor. The new preaching will discuss the concrete conduct problems confronting us all, and will show how those problems can be solved. The new evangelistic endeavor will help tired, bewildered, and discouraged people to understand themselves and their own difficulties, help them see where the path to victory lies, and then help them take the first steps toward ultimate triumph and the accompanying reorganization of the self.

The better preachers of our own day are already revealing this new ideal and utilizing this new technique. In their sermons there is no attempt to motivate a change in attitudes and actions by appealing to the hope of future reward or the fear of future punishment. The problem of character reconstruction is approached from the angle of the new knowledge and the new method of character transformation. In these sermons we note two new and highly significant emphases.

To begin with, these sermons explain carefully why people do wrong. Whether the problem under

discussion is worry, bad temper, or moods of discouragement, the sermon gives a careful analysis of the difficulty and explains why it has arisen. The people who hear such a sermon gain a priceless help —a thorough understanding of their own situation. They no longer think of themselves as harassed by inexplicable temptations sent by an incomprehensible Devil. They realize they are normal human beings in whom familiar forces have created problems which, though perplexing, are capable of solution. An individual with such a view of himself and his difficulties has taken the first step toward victory. He has learned to think of himself as a problem, rather than as a victim of Satanic spite. He has gained that invaluable thing which psychologists call insight.

> There's a fellow in your office
> Who complains and carps and whines
> Till you'd almost do a favor
> To his heirs and his assigns!
> But I'll tip you to a secret,
> And this queer chap is involved—
> He's no enemy to fight with,
> He's a problem to be solved.

That is the point of view of the new preaching.

The other new emphasis in the better sermons of to-day is this. These sermons aim to give the hearers

new courage, new hope, new confidence in themselves. Here again the new preaching is in line with the new knowledge regarding character transformation. Many of the sermons of the past, carping on sin, failure, and eternal punishment, had a fatal psychological effect. They sent people away from church actually less able to manage themselves and face life. Two generations ago Robert Louis Stevenson attended a Sunday service in England, and that afternoon wrote a friend, "I went to church this morning, and strange to say I was *not* discouraged." What a comment on the average sermon of that day! Beside that record of old-fashioned preaching we might well put a record of modern preaching. A man who had just heard Phillips Brooks exclaimed as he left Trinity Church, "He always makes me feel so strong!" Is there any question which type of preaching is more helpful?

There are many ways by which a skillful preacher can thus waken within his hearers new courage and hope. A study of the technique of the better modern sermons discloses what these methods are. A preacher can picture the finer qualities hidden within us all, qualities which invariably emerge as soon as we make a determined effort to live at our

best. He can describe the victories other people—and people with tragic handicaps, too—have won. He can remind his hearers, either directly or in some more subtle way, of the faith their friends have in them. Most effective of all, he can assure his people that the love, the help, and the steadying power of God are realities. The divine reinforcements surround us all, and are immediately available when we open our lives to receive them. Who can measure the effect of such preaching? It finds people discouraged and bewildered, wondering whether they can manage the chaotic powers within their life and the hostile forces attacking them from without. It sends them from church with a song in their hearts, and the light of victory in their eyes. It convinces them that they can be not only conquerors but more than conquerors through Him that loves us. Such sermons may not be accompanied by scenes of religious hysteria. But they are followed by an immense number of secret and silent victories won on the hidden battlefields of many hearts.

V

All this helps us answer a question which, in one form or another, numberless people are now asking.

They tell us that the Christianity of the past, with its spectacular beliefs and its highly emotional appeals, was able to alter human lives profoundly. That Christianity could point, these people say, to an impressive roster of saved souls. Can the new Christianity, discarding the stern God of retributive punishment and substituting the kind God of forgiveness and eager help, show similar triumphs? Has the new religion redemptive power?

Suppose we grant frankly there are some people who can be moved more powerfully by fear than by any other emotion. There are other people—and some of us are convinced that this second group now constitutes the great majority—who respond more deeply to a different appeal. The message of God's love, God's confidence, God's unfailing willingness to help, touches this second group in a way that the message of an alleged divine wrath can never do. For these men and women—and who doubts that their number is constantly increasing?—the new gospel has infinitely more power than the old. It speaks of love, and for these people love is the strongest power there is.

During the dark days of the Civil War, when the Northern cause seemed irretrievably lost, a boy from

New York who was serving in a cavalry regiment lost his courage and deserted. He was captured, court-martialed, and sentenced to be shot. In fear and despair he appealed to Lincoln. If Lincoln would pardon him and help him he would return to his regiment and serve till the end of the war, no matter how long the war lasted. Lincoln wrote the boy a note which is now preserved in the archives in Washington. "On condition that Roswell McIntyre of the 6th Regiment of the New York Cavalry returns to his post and faithfully serves out his term, making up for lost time, he is hereby fully pardoned for any supposed desertion heretofore committed, and this paper is his pass to go to his regiment. Signed—A. Lincoln." Did McIntyre respond? Were friendship and kindness powerful enough to transform his character? The last cavalry action of the war was at Five Forks, Virginia, in 1865. After the battle a New York soldier was found dead on the field. Pinned inside his uniform was a faded letter, a letter from Abraham Lincoln, a letter of forgiveness and friendship. Roswell McIntyre had kept his promise. He had gone through to the end.

CHAPTER XII

DO THE NEW BELIEFS ROB CHRISTIANITY OF ITS BEAUTY?

I

ONE of the most interesting passages in the Book of Genesis is the one which describes the supposed origin of the rainbow. The writer, probably a Hebrew priest of twenty-four centuries ago, says that after the flood God promised Noah there would never be another destruction by water. Then the writer attributes to God these interesting words. "I will set my rainbow in the cloud, as a token of the covenant between me and the earth." [1] Obviously the writer had a prescientific conception of the rainbow. For him it was not, as it is for us, an immaterial arch of color produced by the refraction of sunlight as the light-rays stream through drops of falling rain. Rather it was a gigantic and picturesque token miraculously created by God at the conclusion of every shower, and hung boldly across the clouds to assure observers there would never be another flood.

[1] Genesis ix. 13.

When men saw the rainbow they would, no matter how violent the storms might be, regain their courage and confidence. When God saw the rainbow He would remember He had promised, no matter what provocations might arise, never to drown the human race again. Suppose you had asked the author of Genesis whether there were any rainbows before the flood. He would have replied there were none. According to his theory Noah had seen the first. Before Noah's time there had never been such a spectacle in the sky.

These beliefs, beautiful as poetry but untrue as fact, persisted for some seventeen centuries. They were accepted first by the Jews and then by the Christians, and until the time of the early scientists few people dreamed of questioning them. Were they not taught by the Bible, and was not the Bible the Word of God? But about the year 1250 Roger Bacon began to devise a new theory about the rainbow.[2] He made many experiments with lenses and prisms, and eventually discovered the principle of the refraction of light. At once he realized that rainbows are not produced by miraculous divine acts. On the con-

[2] For these references see A. D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, I, 386-390.

trary they are the work of the blind and unconscious forces of Nature. No matter what the Book of Genesis says, rainbows must have appeared in the sky with unfailing regularity since the beginning of time. Bacon stated his new views publicly and the religious leaders of the day were roused to furious opposition. They declared that if Bacon's teaching spread, Christianity would be imperiled. Who was this experimenter with lenses who dared question the express statement of Scripture? In 1278 Bacon was thrown into prison and kept there for no less than fourteen years. Just after his eightieth birthday he was released and a few months later he died. At the end he was heard to murmur sadly, "Would I had not given myself so much trouble for the love of science!" The news of his death was hailed by his enemies with unconcealed delight. Religion was safe once more. The man who had tried to rob the rainbow of its beauty was dead.

But what happened? As the years passed, more and more people recognized the truth of Bacon's statements. Eventually his theory about the rainbow became part of the accepted wisdom of the world. If we told an intelligent boy to-day that rainbows are miraculous and special creations, and that the

first was displayed just after the flood, he would stare at us in astonishment. A belief that was accepted for seventeen centuries would seem to him utterly incomprehensible. Has this new knowledge wrecked religion? Has it taken the beauty from Christian faith? For a time the new ideas disturbed some people greatly. But as the centuries passed it was realized that these new ideas were the precursors of a new era in human history, an era of wider knowledge and keener intelligence with a new religion of its own. Is the Christianity of to-day the equal of the Christianity of Roger Bacon's time? Most of us would have little hesitation in answering that question. For all its shortcomings modern Christianity is far truer and finer than the superstitious, intolerant, uninformed faith which sent Bacon to prison seven centuries ago. It has found a hundred new beauties to take the place of the one which a brave man, experimenting with a prism, discredited and swept away.

II

It is against some such background that we must study the present situation in the religious world. Just as the thirteenth century brought men the begin-

nings of a new scientific knowledge so the nineteenth century brought them the beginnings of a new religious enlightenment. First came a new and immensely significant understanding of the Bible. Intelligent people came to realize that the Bible is not a divinely dictated and verbally infallible document, but a collection of religious writings produced by many ancient Hebrews and many early Christians. The statements of these men prove to be partially true and partially false, and in our effort to sift truth from error we must use the same methods we employ when we study the other literary productions of the ancient, or the modern, world. Shortly after the era of modern Bible study began, another highly significant development commenced. Scholars started investigating the non-Christian religions with a new spirit of tolerance and appreciation. For centuries Christians had insisted that all these rival faiths are untrue. It was even whispered that some of them had been devised by the Devil for the express purpose of deluding human beings and leading them down to hell. But when the ethnic and the primitive faiths were studied in a less prejudiced and a more sympathetic way, what facts were disclosed? Scholars discovered that the non-Christian religions contain

elements of indubitable truth, that they reflect the culture and the dominant beliefs of the communities within which they developed, and that they—like our own Christianity—are attempts to understand and explain the vast mystery of life. These ideas, unknown to our grandparents, are part and parcel of the thinking of an intelligent Christian to-day. In company with the new ideas about the Bible they have precipitated a momentous change in our basic religious beliefs.

But the most revolutionary change came in a third field. Just before the turn of the century scholars began to interpret Jesus in a new way. Up to that time the great majority of Christians had been content to accept the picture of Jesus drawn by Paul and John. He was regarded as a supernatural being who had come to Earth in a miraculous way, who had performed many miracles during his brief stay among men, who had died on Calvary to atone for the sin committed by Adam, and who had risen from the grave and returned to heaven in a climactic display of divine power. There was little attempt to relate Jesus to the life and thought of the Palestinian world within which he lived, and practically no one ventured to suggest that some of Jesus' ideas be-

longed to that world rather than to our own. The common assumption was that if men would only "take Jesus in earnest" and "follow in his steps" the problems of individual and collective life would find a swift and sure solution.

But early in the present century new ideas began to make their appearance. Men who had studied the records of first-century Judaism and the records of Jesus' teaching began to say frankly that Jesus was as truly a member of his world as we to-day are members of ours. Preachers cannot drag Jesus and all his words into the twentieth century any more than some well-meaning individual could drag us and all our beliefs into the first century. In studying Jesus we must thus be content to let him remain, at some points in his thinking, a man of ancient Nazareth. Only at certain other points can we apply his ideas to the new civilization which has come into existence in modern times.

During the past thirty years this new interpretation of Jesus has gained wider and wider acceptance among discriminating people. The recent biographies of Jesus have made vigorous attempts to relate him and his sayings to the environment in which he lived. There has been a noticeable decrease in the number

of efforts to quote Jesus on such characteristically modern problems as wage scales, justifiable rates of profit, and the propriety of certain forms of current amusement. On all sides we find a growing realization that Jesus never faced these problems, and that the attempt to deduce from his recorded sayings solutions of these problems is foredoomed to fail. Similarly many people have now abandoned the unfortunate and wholly unnecessary effort to prove that everything Jesus said was completely, permanently, and universally true. They are now content to let Jesus remain at certain points in his thinking a man of the first century, and they no longer devise fanciful explanations of his thoroughly understandable and pardonable mistakes. When we contemplate this radical change in the attitude toward Jesus, and when we add to it the significant change in our attitude toward the Bible and our attitude toward the non-Christian faiths, we can understand why the last half-century has been the most momentous era of change recorded in the religious world since the days of Luther. Christianity has silently cast off its ancient moorings and, like a ship leaving the harbor lights astern, is now voyaging toward a new world beyond an uncharted sea.

These changes have naturally disturbed great numbers of people. The disturbance has been most keenly felt by the men and women in middle life and beyond. Their religious ideas were gained at the end of the old era, and the new religious ideas which have come into the world since 1900 seem to them not only unconvincing but highly dangerous. Sometimes their feeling of confusion and resentment assumes the form of a belligerent loyalty to the old convictions and a violent antipathy toward the new. Sometimes these older people reveal a quieter and a sadder attitude. Are not the new beliefs taking the old beauty from religion? How can a man love his Bible as he used to when he is taught to ask whether Amos was right in his vigorous indictment of the rich, and when he is urged to inquire whether Jesus' solution of the problem of divorce represents the last word of wisdom on that subject? How can a Christian enthuse over his own religion as he once did when he is told that the Hindus have undoubtedly discovered certain truths about God, and that Confucius said things which might well be printed beside the Sermon on the Mount? How can he reverence Jesus as he used to when New Testament scholars have dismissed the nativity stories as legends,

stated that some of the miracles never happened, and pointed out the obvious contradictions in the successive accounts of the resurrection?

Here, it seems to many of us, are questions that deserve a patient and sympathetic hearing. The violent reactionaries who demand that we reject the new wisdom that has come during the last few decades can be quietly left to their inevitable fate. There is not the slightest chance that their appeal will be followed. But the puzzled conservatives, asking sadly whether the new beliefs do not rob Christianity of its ancient splendor, deserve different treatment. Their criticism of the new teaching should be faced squarely and answered honestly. When a liberal does this what can he say in defense of the new views?

III

There are two facts which will occur to anyone who studies this question thoughtfully. One is that many elements in Christianity are wholly unaffected by the new attitudes and beliefs. Confused and apprehensive conservatives usually overlook this fact. They conclude hastily that the new theories destroy everything that has made the old faith precious. As a matter of fact whole ranges of Christian belief and

practice are left entirely untouched. This is specially clear in the case of the finer passages of Scripture. Nothing that Biblical scholarship has said weakens in the slightest the majestic power of such words as these:

> What doth the Lord thy God require of thee
> But to do justly, love mercy,
> And walk humbly with thy God? [8]

The value of such a passage is not affected by the conclusions we reach in regard to the date and the authorship of the Book of Micah, or the beliefs we come to hold about the accuracy of the writer's other statements. Here, at any rate, the new ideas do not take the beauty from the ancient faith.

Similarly we are not compelled to abandon Christianity or even lower our estimate of it when the study of the non-Christian religions convinces us that some of the adherents of these other faiths have had a valid experience of God. What if there are many doorways to the heart of the Eternal? Consider this exquisite prayer by Rabindranath Tagore: "If Thou speakest not, I will fill my heart with Thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil, my head bent low with

[8] Micah vi:8.

patience. The morning will come, the darkness will vanish, and Thy voice will pour down in golden streams flooding the sky." Obviously such a man knows the meaning and the value of prayer. But the fact that he has found God along the road of Hinduism need not make us distrust our ability to find the same God along the road of Christianity. It surely need not make us value our road less highly, or recommend it with any less enthusiasm to the individuals who—when all is said—might become Christians but will never become Hindus.

The same principle holds true when we study the new views of Jesus. Even if we eliminate entirely the miraculous element in the story of Jesus' life the significant things which he said retain their incomparable beauty. The old words, "He that would be greatest among you shall be the servant of all," bring a profound message even if the man who uttered them was born in the usual way. The noble saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God," is not robbed of its splendor when we confess that the man who uttered it made an inaccurate diagnosis of epilepsy. The new knowledge—whether of the Bible, or of the non-Christian faiths, or of Jesus himself—has not destroyed the old faith. It has left un-

touched the finest elements in the Christianity of the past.

The other fact which we soon discover is this. The new knowledge has proved enormously valuable to many individuals, particularly young people who have had an education of the modern type. Suppose we confess that there are many individuals, chiefly men and women in middle life and beyond, who are neither puzzled by nor interested in the intellectual problems connected with modern Christianity. These people can read the Bible without noting its contradictions and misstatements, and they can accept by faith beliefs which individuals of a more analytical type wish to have supported by cogent argument. There are, on the other hand, thousands of people, mainly young men and women who have been trained in modern ways of thinking, who are unable to follow such procedures. This second group must understand before it can believe, love God with the mind before it can love Him with the heart. To these individuals the new interpretation of Christianity has been of incalculable help. Without it they would have lost their religious faith entirely.

During the World War a young engineer, stationed in a manufacturing plant operated by the

Government, wrote this letter to a minister who had been presenting the new beliefs in a series of open discussions on religion: "When I came here a few months ago the Bible had grown to mean absolutely nothing to me. I was clinging to a few shreds of the religion I had inherited from my parents because I instinctively felt their religion was right, not because it appealed to my intelligence. The plain fact was it did not. Six years in Columbia Engineering School had so developed my powers of analysis that I realized most of the things I was basing my religion on would not stand investigation. This was my plight when I was detailed for service here. At these meetings of yours I heard for the first time the new interpretation of the Bible, of Jesus, and of the Christian religion. It has converted me to Christianity as truly as if I had been raised a Buddhist instead of an orthodox Presbyterian." [4] Granted there are many people to whom the new ideas seem disconcerting or even dangerous. Let us never forget there are other people, and probably quite as many of them, to whom these same ideas have been a light shining in a dark place.

[4] A personal letter addressed to the author.

IV

But the important fact is still to be stated. The new knowledge which has come during the last few decades is preparing the way for the next great form of Christianity, a form that will almost certainly emerge in clear outline before the end of the twentieth century. This new form of Christianity will possess new values and new beauties of its own, values and beauties which will take the place of those that have been recently destroyed. When Roger Bacon discovered the truth about the rainbow one of the oldest and loveliest legends of the human race was swept away. But Bacon's discovery did more than wreck an ancient fancy. It also pointed the way forward to a new era in human history—an era in which a new science and a new religion gradually emerged, disclosing beauties far finer than those which men had known before. Another such development now seems under way. The new religious truths discovered during the past fifty years have swept away many venerable but essentially unfounded beliefs. Those new truths are now pointing us forward to a new epoch in Christian thought and life, an epoch in which whatever wisdom we can salvage from the past will be combined with the fresh wis-

dom God is revealing to our generation. Out of this combination of the old knowledge and the new the next major formulation of the convictions and ideals of Christianity will gradually develop. The type of Christianity devised by Luther and his successors has served the world for four centuries. Now there are numberless indications that a new era in religious evolution has begun, and that a new form of Christianity is already taking shape.

Have we any idea what the new Christianity will teach? Many of its convictions and beliefs will be taken unchanged from the past. There are certain points, particularly in the field of ethics, at which the thoughtful people of our time agree with the thoughtful men and women of earlier generations. But at other points, as this book has tried to show, the new Christianity will have a message that is essentially new. It will offer a new interpretation of human life and history, an interpretation based on our new knowledge of the origin and the development of our race. It will offer a new account of the forces arrayed against humanity, and a new technique for winning victory over them. It will offer a new conception of the immortality which opens before us all, and a new picture of the loving God who leads

men through the disciplines and opportunities of this existence toward that future of continued growth and ever-advancing power. Most significant of all, it will offer a new portrait of Jesus. It will reveal him as the supreme leader and inspirer of our race—the man who found for humanity the sure road to an abundant life, and the man who disclosed to humanity the fatherly God who guides us to that road and then walks it with us, now and throughout the eternity to come.

While this new form of Christianity is taking shape, multitudes of people—destined, unhappily, to live at the end of one era and the beginning of another—will be plagued by uncertainty and doubt. But as Christianity makes the transition from the old order to the new these difficulties will fade. A day will come when the synthesis between knowledge and faith will be reëstablished, and to our children and their children the story of our present confusion will be a tale of far-off, unhappy things.

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